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PURANIC SPIRITUALITY

SPIRITUALITY OF THE PERIYAPURANAM

R. Gopalakrishnan

SPIRITUALITY OF THE LINGA PURANA

G. Lourduswami

SPIRITUALITY OF THE SIVA PURANA

Ignatius Hirudayam

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DISCUSSION FORUM:

THE CURRAN CASE: SOME THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Joseph Kottukapally

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JEEVADHARA

The Fulness of Life

PURANIC SPIRITUALITY

E d i t o r

SWAMI VIKRANT

Jeevadhara
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Editorial

The current issue of *Jeevadhara* is an attempt at exploring the spirituality of the Hindu *Purānas*. Five of the eighteen Puranas have been selected for analysis and reflection. The authors have, by and large, attempted only analysis and occasional reflections, and refrained from critical or comparative study. Exposition of the text is the burden of the articles.

An apology for choosing the theme of Puranic spirituality seems to be in order. The Puranic world is practically an unexplored realm of religious reflection or philosophical study in India. The reason is not far to seek. Compared to the lofty metaphysical speculations of the Upanishads, the Puranas use the mythic language, and myths have generally been dubbed as fiction and falsehood. Even Bauer and Gunkel of the German 'Mythical School' were not free from this error and the Biblical scholar Fr. Benoit O.P. also identified myth with error. But scholars like Mircea Eliade, have asserted the high value of myth as a religious language.

Hinduism considered myth as the best medium of popular instruction. The Puranas are nothing but the catechetics of the Upanishads

The explication of Christian faith had suffered much damage because of the amalgamation with the rationalistic Greek thought paradigm, which discounted the values of imagination, emotion and aesthetics. Indian catechesis is mainly through mythology, drama, dance and poetry. The Western conceptualistic catechesis could not deliver the goods; it only alienated the youth from the Church and left the masses to their popular devotions, often bordering

on magic and superstition. The transplanting of this exotic catechetics in Asia had appalling consequences.

It is high time that the Indian Churches recapture the Puranic paradigm as a catechetical and proclamational tool. The mythic language, in association with music, drama and poetry is calculated to elevate the tired human spirit to a meta-cosmic region, beyond the constraints of the spatio-temporal dimensions. There he becomes a contemporary of the mythic personalities and gets a temporary respite from his mundane toils and enjoys the mystic auroral bliss.

Three of the articles study this mystic experience in ancient Saivism and two study the Vaishnava tradition. R. Gopalakrishnan of Madras University studies the mysticism of the *Periya Purana* from the hagiographic point of view. G. Lourdasamy studies the esoteric symbolism of the *Linga Purana*, and Ignatius Hirudayam explains the mystic and symbolic doctrines of the massive *Siva Purana*, and the various devotional practices of the Saivites.

Subhash Anand and Swami Vikrant study the spirituality of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Vishnu Purana* respectively. Subhash fully brings out the nature of supreme devotion, divine grace, and *Satsang*. The study of the *Vishnu Purana* explains the social and religious life of people during the Puranic period as modified under the impact of heterodox movements like Bhuddhism and Jainism. The rise of sectarian movements taught our ancient ancestors the noble virtue of tolerance, respect for others' views and mutual assimilation. Against the background of present day India's traumatic and convulsive experience of religious fanaticism, caste prejudice, communal violence and fratricidal terrorism, the spirit of socio-religious harmony taught by the Puranas should act as a beacon light of hope.

The Spirituality of the Periyapurānam

Introduction

Throughout the world Hinduism has attained time-honoured eminence because of its vast philosophical treatises and religious literature. For any religion to flourish and to withstand the ordeals of time, faithful followers are indispensable. The holy life of the devotees of any religion reflects the growth of that religion. A true religion need not depend upon mere speculative ideals, for, religion is not merely a set of observances and prescriptions, but it is the sustaining force which promotes the right type of living. It is generally claimed that religion is not a stagnant pool, but a living stream. The consciousness of a devotee will ever be surging towards the deity which he adores; his breath will be inhaling the auspicious features and exhaling all vicious tendencies; his mouth will be ever praising the glorious feet of the Lord; his eyes will be visualizing the optimistic ideals in life; his ears will be hearing the praises of the Lord and his devotional hymns; his bones and flesh will be prepared to serve his fellowmen at their call; though human, the devotee never cares for accumulating wealth, but opts for the acquisition of spiritual vigour by means of devotion, service and sacrifice. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, the celebrated Hindu text on spirituality, prescribes the characteristics of saintliness thus: "He who is not perturbed in mind by adversity, who has no eagerness amidst prosperity, he from whom desires, fear and anger have fallen away — he is called a sage of firm understanding."¹

1, *The Bhagavad Gītā*, II, 56

I. History

Saivism, one among the six major religious sects of Hinduism, is known for its devotional literature — *Panniru Tirumuṟaiḡal* (the twelve canonical and philosophical texts and fourteen *Siddhānta Sāstras*). The *Periyapurāṇam* forms the twelfth *Tirumuṟai*, which is a work of unique grandeur. While the other eleven works deal with the revelation of the first-hand experiences the saints had with the Lord, the twelfth one graphically narrates the life history of the spiritual heroes of the Saivite tradition.

The *Periyapurāṇam* is an explanatory work to the *Tiruthonḍar Tiruvandhāti* of Nambiandar Nambi which is an expository text of the *Tiruthonḍathogai* of St. Sundarar which is the original or primary text. Sekkilar and St. Sundarar received the blessings of Lord Śiva in abundance in the form of oracular voice to commence their divinity-infused songs. It is quite fortunate that the former had considered the latter as the hero of his epic. St. Sundarar was the direct recipient of the grace of the Lord twice. First, when Lord Śiva enslaved St. Sundarar during his wedding celebrations. When the saint recognised Lord Śiva who came in the disguise of a Brahmin saint to reclaim him as a person from his evil ways, he could not praise His boundless grace in adequate terms. Lord Śiva came to his rescue and asked him to begin his song with the 'mad man' since the saint called Him with that epithet as the Brahmin saint proclaimed much contrary to the convention that St. Sundarar was his slave. Throughout Sundarar's *Thevāram* hymns one may notice the reflection of fraternity and imperative affection between the Lord and the saint.

Secondly, when the saint did not notice the presence of the devotees of Lord Śiva gathered at a hall in the Tiruvarur temple precincts, a devotee known as Viranminda was provoked with ire since he was under the impression that Sundarar had slighted the devotees and declared both Sundarar and Śiva 'out of bounds'. St. Sundarar realised his mistake and prayed to Śiva to help him in getting rid

of the disparagement. Lord Siva declares the greatness of the devotees thus: "They are great like only unto themselves (even as the sea can be vast, like only itself); they have attained Me because of their one-pointedness (of devotion); defects or deficiencies, they have none whatever. They are in a state difficult of achievement (by others). They enjoy bliss through their love. They have overcome desires for the 'here' and 'hereafter'. You shall join them". (Translation by Dr. V.A. Devasenapathi). Here too the saint seeks the Lord's favour to spell out the first word. Lord Siva willingly obliged. He enslaved the saint with the gift of appropriate poetry and commenced "even to the devotees of the Brahmins of Thillai (Chidambaram), I am a devotee", St Sundarar praises the invincible heroism of sixty three individuals and nine groups of devotees. It is interesting to note that only at Thillai Sekkilar also graciously acknowledged to compose the lives and deeds of the saints by the Lord with the voice 'All over the World'. Thus we see that in all cases the First Hero is Lord Siva who is the guiding and inspiring source for the divine poetry. St. Sundarar praises the glory of the galaxy of devotees in one or two sentences while Sekkilar has made the saint himself as his hero and narrates the biographies of the saints in thousands of verses.

In memorable terms Sekkilar portrays the general characteristics of Saivite saints thus:-

The Lord himself, to bestow His grace, sought out some of the devotees among whom some experienced the divine thrill in their very being out of love; some of them were engaged in manual labour. There were, besides them, countless others.

Their hearts were as pure as the sacred ashes which they smeared over their body. They made all quarters bright through the lustre of their spiritual radiation.

Even if every act goes against its stipulated course, there would prevail unswerving devotion to the Lord. Their persistent path of steadfast devotion made them the embodiments of virtues, devoid of vices.

The devotees did not suffer from the calculation of loss or gain, since they transcended both spiritual wealth and material wealth. Consequently, they treated alike gold and potsherd (as trifles). Since they were engrossed in their love for worshipping (the deity), they did not even wish for release from bondage. Such was their heroic mould.

They were known for their simplicity. Their main objective in life was to undertake God's service and nothing else. They were in the state of benign love of unfathomable depth. Their greatness of valour could not be aptly revealed.

The Śaivite devotees accepted the supremacy of Lord Śiva and ever contemplated over his adorable feet. They realized that their senses, mind and intellect and the spirit were all meant for God-realization rather than for mundane enjoyment. The saints through their sacred lives and noble deeds sought the grace of Śiva and He responded to their calls like the instantaneous response of a cow to the call of its calf. There prevailed an affectionate reciprocity between the saints and Śiva in the sense that they moved towards their Lord while the Lord wished to be in their company. One may be reminded of the famous statement of St. Mathew here: "There is also the testimony of Jesus — where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."²

The galaxy of devotees includes women saints, kings, ministers, illiterates, the wealthy, the poor, musicians, warriors, hunters, agriculturists, fishermen, priests, chieftains, and others. They did not enrich their material comforts through these professions, but served the Lord and his fellowmen. They formed a kind of spiritual commonwealth which inspired love and worship, service and sacrifice and relegated economic inequalities, social differences, racial discriminations, communal disharmony, caste distinctions etc. Neither age nor sex was a hindrance to their spiritual progress. The *Periyapuranam* gives a detailed account of the meeting of the devotees, their interaction,

warm reception, close movements, hospitalities, mutual co-operation among themselves, their efforts to prevent mischief etc.

In the life-portrayal of the Śaivite saints in the *Periyapurāṇam* we come across many instances wherein the devotees behave contrary to the conventional canons of personal and social moral codes. Pure love transcends the laws of morality. How does the divine grace impinge upon the devotees and how do the devotees respond to it are beyond human comprehension. The *Periyapurāṇam* as a whole, delineates the operation of divine grace, either implicitly or explicitly. The devotees too, on their part, had to undergo trials and tribulations to become the recipients of Śiva's grace. Kannappar, for instance, a hunter by birth, gradually broke away from the worldly entanglements on seeing the Lord's image at Kalathi hills and became the very embodiment of divine wisdom. Contrary to the Agamic type of adoration, the hunter-saint offered good meat, forest flowers, poured water from his mouth and moved about with his chappals. Lord Śiva wanted to show to the agonising Śaivite priest and to the world the significance of perfect love the saint had towards Him. One day, when the surroundings exposed bad omen, the saint, with a dreaded heart and soul, approached the Lord who made his right eye to bleed. As the saint could not stop the bleeding despite his efforts with herbs etc., he realized the customary saying, "flesh medicine for flesh". Immediately he plucked one of his eyes and placed it against the bleeding eye. The bleeding stopped. But Kannappar's joy did not last long, since another eye of the Śivalinga was bleeding. As he knew the remedy, this time he placed his foot near the bleeding eye to enable him to locate it when he would go totally blind after removing his remaining eye. When he was about to pluck his eye, the Lord stopped him and blessed him to be for ever by His right side. The priest saw the occurrence and was struck with wonder and awe since the devotee was totally immersed in the deep-rooted love towards Śiva which did not remind him of his condition after plucking away both his eyes. Śiva Himself told the divine per-

meated nature of Kannappar to the priest in his dream thus:

"His whole body is constituted by love for me; his whole mind is engaged in knowing me; his action, one and all, is dear to me, understand that such indeed is his state." Kannappar was later hailed by St. Manickavacakar in his *Tiruvācakam*. The latter's love was not equal to that of the former and still the Lord had consideration for the love of Manickavacakar. Adi Sankara also had praised St. Kannappar.

A devotee by name Iyarpahai Nayanar was tested by Lord Siva as to whether his love of the Lord was intense or not. The devotee had acquired a good habit of not refusing anything required of him by his fellow devotees. The Lord intended to show his steadfast love and his promising statements to other devotees. He came in the guise of a devotee and ascertained of him his natural tendency to say 'never' to a devotee. Then the Lord demanded his wife which is an outrageous act by conventional standards. As the devotee had disregarded his wealth etc. and relinquished the thought of possessiveness, he easily yielded to the plea of the devotee. But his kith and kin vehemently opposed this unnatural behaviour. However, his wife helped her husband to keep his word and parted company with him. Iyarpahai attacked those who opposed his determined act. Finally, he triumphed in the test and the Lord disappeared leaving his wife behind. The ephemeral view of the world is inferior to the life of spirituality wherein non-possession, keeping up the promise, etc. predominate.

Siruthondar became a saint after realizing the impermanency of human life, since, as an army general, he won a great victory, but felt sad for the loss of several lives. The King too after knowing his pious nature and devotedness, relieved him of his royal services and requested him to engage in devotional services to the Lord and his devotees. Once Paranjoti, then became Siruthondar, a devotee who showed utter humility in the holy gathering of devotees and took extreme delight in serving them like a faithful servant.

Siruthondar cultivated the habit of feeding devotees of Siva before he took his meal. One day he went out in search of a devotee. At that time, a mendicant devotee (Siva in disguise) arrived at Siruthondar's house and awaited his arrival. When Siruthondar came to know about the visit of the devotee he felt overwhelming joy and invited him to his house. The fierce-looking devotee demanded the meat of a boy — the only son to his parents, to be willingly given by the parents, to be held by the mother and cut by the father. Men of common intelligence and rationalistic outlook may conclude that this type of demand and the acceptance of fulfilling the desire of the devotee is cruel, barbaric and inhuman. But to those who have completely submerged in the divine compassion and subdued the worldly ties and family attachments such acts become quite natural and unassumingly they offer the required things. Such distinguished souls have denounced the senses of 'I' and 'Mine'. As everything exists for the sake of God, it is not difficult for them to sacrifice anything they considered important. Siruthondar's wife gladly accepted the decision of her husband and offered their only son's meat after cooking it deliciously. Lord Siva was immensely pleased by the noble but rare deed of the devotee and made their son alive. He disappeared from the scene but made His vision with His consort and Son, Lord Muruga.

The *Periyapurānam* exquisitely exemplifies the lives and deeds of the three great saints of Saivism, viz., St. Thirujnanasambandhar, St. Thirunavukkarasar (St. Appar) and St. Sundarar. St. Sambandhar's life depicts the love between a child and father, St. Appar's life reveals the love between the servant and master and St. Sundarar's life shows the love between two friends.

St. Sambandhar and Appar were contemporaries who were responsible for the revival and resurgence of Saivism in Tamilnadu. The former saint is said to have drunk the milk of divine wisdom from Parvati, Siva's consort, at His bidding, when the child (Sambandhar) was crying 'Amma' (Mother) and 'Appa' (Father) looking at the temple tower. As the child drunk of it, he became at

once an inspired sage, absolutely and forever consecrated to Siva, in consequence of which he received the epithet of *Āṇḍaiya piḷḷaiyar* ('the God's own child') and Thiru Janana Sambandhar ('he who is conjoined with divine wisdom'). He had introduced many types of devotional poetry in Tamil. His *Tēvaram* hymns are elegant in praising the Lord, in contemptuously criticising the alien faiths, in describing natural beauty etc. He performed several miracles in his life span. He is said to have raised a Brahmin merchant from the dead at the request of his niece. Also at Mylapore, he brought alive the lady Poompavai from the pot wherein her ashes and bones were preserved. She was dead due to snake bite, but several years after her death, she gained the years lapsed by her death. When her father offered her as the bride to St. Sambandhar, the saint hesitated to accept her since she had to be considered as his daughter, for he only gave her life. This attitude shows the magnanimity of the saint. He and St. Appar joined together and engaged in driving away poverty famine etc. by receiving gold coins from Lord Siva at Thiruveelimilalai.

St. Appar is depicted as a pious devotee and his *Tēvaram* songs express his affection towards Lord Siva and his fellowmen. He carried on his shoulders the palanquin in which St. Sambandhar was travelling, not bothering about his age or experience. The Saivite devotees will revere each other as if they have seen Lord Siva Himself. For, in Saivism, the sacred appearance as a saint is venerated as Siva. St. Sambandhar called him 'Appar' (Father-like saint). St. Appar intended to visit Kailas, the dwelling place of Lord Siva and to have a glance of Him. He was firm in his conviction and proceeded towards the north and worshipped all the Siva temples en route. As his body could not withstand the journey, he became physically tired, but mentally steadfast in executing his decision. He rolled and moved on the ground. When Siva came in the form of a saint and dissuaded him from the move, St. Appar retorted immediately that he would not leave Mount Kailas with the mortal body without seeing the re-

igning God. At the behest of Lord Siva, the saint bathed in a pond there and got up at Thiruvaiyaru and witnessed the glorified scene of Siva-Sakthi everywhere. Lord Siva also wanted to test his worldly attachments by putting precious stones etc. when he was cleansing the temple precincts with the instrument called *Uḷavārappaḍai*. But the saint did not develop any fascination for them since his heart and soul were totally filled with divine fervour. Again, the Lord sent divine damsels to test his mental tranquillity, but the saint had not even a glance at them.

The devotees had made a vow to give some articles as gift to the temple and to the fellow devotees as well to enrich their interest and enthusiasm in the field of spirituality. The *Periyapurāṇam* narrates some events of this sort wherein the Lord severely tested them. Tirunelakantar had developed the habit of freely giving earthen bowls to Saivite saints. When he was young, he could not practise celibacy and the wiles of the world affected him. His wife discovered it and hated him by saying "don't touch us by the holy word *Tirunilakaṇṭam*". These words opened his spiritual eyes and he promised her that he would not touch any woman and kept it up till they became old. Siva wanted to unite them and enacted a drama. He gave the devotee an earthen begging bowl and asked him to keep it safe, but he made it disappear. The devotee failed in his efforts to make the Siva yogi accept a fresh bowl and he demanded his original bowl. The Siva Yogi took his case to the Council of Thillai Brahmins. He asked Tirunilakantar to touch his wife's hand and take a bath in a pond. The devotee cleverly brought a stick, his wife touching one end and himself touching the other end fulfilled the oaths of the Yogi. When they woke up they resumed their youth in all its freshness. Siva appeared with Parvati and blessed him.

Ilaiyankudi Mara Nayanar could not find any way to feed the Saivite saint who had visited his house at a late hour in the evening when rain was pouring down in torrents. He and his wife rushed to the paddy field and collected the sowed paddy seeds and fed the devotee. Such was his conviction.

Amarniti Nayanar used to offer loin cloths to Siva's devotees. Siva came to his house in the guise of a Brahmachari and asked him to preserve a fresh loin cloth, so that He could use it after bathing. By His power, the cloth disappeared and the saint picked up a quarrel with the devotee that he needed only His cloth and not others. Then they tried to settle this issue by placing his clothes in a plate of the weighing scale while in the other a single cloth of the saint would be placed and the balance must be equal. The devotee piled all his clothes and his entire wealth, but they were not equal to a single cloth of the Lord. Then he himself with his wife and son ascended the scales by saying that if his love and service to God was true, the scales should be equal. Both the plates were perfectly balanced. Lord Siva's trials of the devotee ended by explicating the supremacy of devotion, perfection of wisdom etc.

In the Saiva Siddhānta tradition both the temples of Siva and the Saivite appearances are venerated alike. The *Tirumantiram* of Tirumular goes to the extent of saying that any offering to the Lord enshrined in a temple will not reach Him. On the contrary, if any offering is made to the pious devotees, it will certainly reach the Lord. We come across a few saints in the *Periyapurānam* who even sacrificed their lives due to their firm belief in the external appearance even though cunningness triumphed. Meyporul Nayanar, for instance, had an enemy by name Muthanathan who could not win him over on several occasions. As a defeated and disgraced personality, the enemy resorted to unfair means. He became a Saivite saint in appearance, but in his heart was concealed deceit like the lamp-light, possessing the black soot. By giving false hope to the King, that he had to impart the knowledge of a rare *Āgamic* text, the false saint assassinated the King. When the king's faithful servant, Tattan, was about to kill the enemy, the King, full of mercy and compassion, asked him not to kill that saint and escorted him till the borders since "he was his own". The King died only after the servant returned and conveyed the news of the safe de-

parture of the ascetic.

Enadhi Nadha Nayanar also became a victim of the evil motivation of his professional rival who wanted to get rid of him. When Nayanar saw the sacred ashes on his forehead being covered by iron sheaths, but disappeared when he was about to kill him, Nayanar became startled and felt ashamed for attempting to kill a fellow devotee. The devotee pretended to fight, but was killed by his rival.

Among the women devotees, Karaikkalammaiyar is known for : great events, viz., for being called by Siva Himself as 'Mother' and for singing rich religious and philosophical songs. Before marriage, as Punithavati, she had developed fascination towards Lord Siva and honoured His devotees with reverence and hospitality. When she got married, she showed Her miraculous power to her husband by materialising a mango, by the grace of the Lord to substantiate her devotion to Lord Siva. Her husband, out of fear and trembling went abroad considering his wife not an ordinary woman, but divinity inspired. Later Punithavatiyar's relatives traced his whereabouts and brought him before her, but he prostrated at her feet. Everyone there was struck with wonder. Afterwards, the lady prayed to Siva and obtained the form of a demoness who could stand before God ever in prayer, since she could no more bear the flesh and the beauty of her person which was solely for her husband. She went to Mount Kailas and walked on her head, as she was afraid to walk on her feet. When Goddess Parvati asked about her, Siva exclaimed, 'Mother' and Karaikkalammaiyar fell prostrate at His sacred feet calling 'Father'. "Sekkilar exclaims here that the Lord uttered this one good word, so that the whole world may be saved. But how many do really understand all that is implied in this one word ! All that love, and loving sacrifice and the love that finds no fault and bears all faults, that love would save us from all harm and would redeem us from all sin, that love in fact is more typical of Divinity than of humanity. Is not all this synonymous with this one word 'Mother' ? And when the prodigal son

returns and is received into the bosom of the Mother, the response 'Mother'!, implies all. It is the acknowledgement of this all-love, and one's own worthlessness and the sense of joy and bliss which this acknowledgement brings about!''³

As it is very difficult to make an exhaustive study of the spirituality in the lives and deeds of the Saivite devotees, we have mentioned a few incidents as narrated in the *Periyapurāṇam*. The goal, aspiration and even the culmination of spirituality are the Lord, His devotees and the collaboration between them.

II. The Essence of Saiva Spirituality

The following have been considered the essence of spirituality found in the *Periyapurāṇam*.

- 1) The Saivite saints uniformly contemplated the glorious feet of the Lord mainly to realise themselves and preach the same to the masses. They were the messengers of God whose mission was to spread the divine message among the masses. St. Sambandhar's remark that, "My word as His", indicates that he is only a medium through whom God fulfils His benevolent attitude.
- 2) The saints realized the ephemeral nature of the wordly phenomena and hence they decided to shun the idea of empirical enjoyments. They looked forward for an impassionate experience with reference to the world, but developed fascination towards the Lord and His ardent devotees.
- 3) The saints make it clear, that but for Siva's grace, there would not be the emergence of the spirit from empirical shackles. By benevolent tests Lord Siva extricated St. Sundarar and others from the worldly ties and elevated them to a state of tranquillity so as to enable them to serve Him and get away from bondage.
- 4) The saints measured saintliness with the yard-stick of devotion, dedication, service and sacrifice and never

4. Nallasamy Pillai, J. M., *The Periyapurāṇam*, p, 51.

did they adhere to age or birth. The love and affection between St. Appar and St. Sambandhar reveals the fact that they moved together mainly to propagate spiritual ideals and to spread Saivism. They did not subscribe to casteism and other endangering menaces of society.

- 5) As the saints promoted unswerving love towards the Lord and fellow devotees, they did not care for enriching their material comforts. A few Kings sacrificed their royal living and undertook the arduous task of venerating the saints and at the same time led a simple and saintly life. They looked alike at gold and potsherd. St. Appar, for example, did not deviate from his conviction when the divine damsels danced before him and, while he was cleansing the temple, he threw away the valuable stones put before him as if they were potsherds. Even if the whole world is offered as a gift, they would not accept or appreciate it but would long for the company and fellowship of other devotees irrespective of age, colour, creed and caste. St. Appar cries out, "O, Ye vile people, who always quote the scriptures, what avails your family and your lineage. Bow to Siva as One to be worshipped: He, the Lord of Tirumarperu, will bestow His grace on you in a trice" (Translation by Mr. M. Arunachalam).
- 6) The saints have taught a lesson to us that 'one should love one's neighbour as oneself'. This concept of oneness would not have emanated but for the fellow-feeling got through the spiritual coalescence. Even the enemies who attempted at their lives were shown sympathy for the only reason that the enemies were the appearances of Siva. In the Saiva Siddhanta tradition, both the idol in the temple and the appearance of a saint are equally venerated as Siva Himself. The former is regarded as a static shrine while the latter is a mobile shrine.
- 7) The saints have revealed their experiences in mellifluous terms which bear testimony to their spiritual

living and also a lesson to the succeeding generations. These songs are chanted in the temples regularly and at home in occasional rites even today because of their esoteric effect. The devotional songs not only exemplify the spiritual attitudes of the singers concerned, but also extol the benevolent characteristics of Lord Siva, the dependent nature of human beings, the domination of the worldly existence and the evils caused by the senses and mind. The outpourings emphasise the extirpation of passions and attachment to extraneous things like scriptures, lineage, creed etc. At the same time they esteem the cordial relation that prevailed between the Lord and the saints.

- 8) The soul-stirring experiences of the saints are unique in themselves and seem difficult to be adopted at present. Kannappar, for instance, plucked away his eyes to stop bleeding in the eyes of Lord Siva who tested his infatuation. Similarly a saint sacrificed his wife, another his only son and the innumerable ways of sacrificing the limbs of the body to satisfy the need of the Saivite devotee (in many cases Siva in disguise) are really unimaginable and difficult to be practised. But they did so because they led not a self-centred life but a God-centred one. They were dispassionate with reference to blood relations, and severed their connections with worldly things which enabled them to sacrifice their blood relations and possessions and earned an everlasting name in the annals of spiritual history.

Spirituality of the Linga Purana

1. Introduction

The word "Purana" is Sanskrit and it means "ancient" and the title "Purana" signifies "Ancient Lore", indicating that these books declared ancient lore as handed down for the most part by tradition. Its fuller form is "Purana Samhita", meaning "collection of ancient lore". Some historical truth is the nucleus of every Purana. The object of the Puranas is to teach mankind the sublime truth in various forms; and even if they do not contain any historical truth, they form a great authority for us in respect of the highest truth which they inculcate and for the purpose of estimating the philosophical truth contained in any Purana, we need not consider the question whether the personages treated of therein were really historical persons or were fictitious characters. The object of the Puranas was the education of mankind and the sages who constructed them contrived to find some historical personages and to superimpose upon them all the best or worst qualities for the conduct of mankind. *Amarakosa* describes a Purana thus:

*Sargasca pratisargāśca
Vamsō manvantarāṇi ca
Vamsānucaritam cūpi
Puranam Pañcalakṣaṇam.*

According to the definition, a Purana is one which describes *Sarga*, *pratisarga*, *Vamsā*, *manvantara* and *Vamsanucarita*. Among these *Sarga* and *pratisarga*, are natural creation and renovation (Cosmogony). *Vamsa* means history of sages and patriarchs. By *manvantara* is meant the period of different *Manus*. *Vamsanucarita* means genealogy of kings. In the Puranas which are current now, some

of these five divisions are wanting.

Statements about Puranas are found even in the *Brahmanas*. Therefore it is to be surmised that the Puranas existed even before historic times. *Mahabharata* has used the term "Purana" to mean stories about *devas* and *siddhas*. The Upanisads say that Puranas are *Itihāsas* and as such constitute the fifth Veda. *Smṛti* says that Puranas are commentaries on Vedas.

From all these statements it can be gathered that Purānas have hoary past. The great Sanskrit scholar Rangacarya has defined Purana as *Puranava* (*Pura* = old; *nava* = new) meaning, things which are as good as new though existing from olden times. All the Puranas contain praises of *Brahma*, *Viṣṇu* and *Mahesvara*. In most of the Puranas of old, new additions and interpolations are seen. The Puranas in the original were said to have existed before Christ.

The Puranas are generally divided into two groups viz., Mahapuranas (or great Puranas) and Upapuranas (or supplementary Puranas). The Upapuranas consist of eighteen parts and their names sometimes vary according to the book describing them. The Mahapuranas, also eighteen in number, instead have fixed number of parts and fixed titles. These eighteen Mahapuranas give us some hints of the existence of one of several Puranas which contributed to the contents they have in common. This hypothesis is based on the fact that *Amarakosa* points out *Pañcalaksana* as a synonym of Purana and that other similar definitions are found in many other works. We can say that the comparative study of the puranic texts done by F. E. Pargiter and Willibald Kirfel (F.E. Pargiter: "The Purana text of the dynasties of the Kali Age with introduction and notes", Humphery Milford, 1928, Reprint, the Chowkhamba Sanskrit series Office, Varanasi, 1962 and Willibald Kirfel: "Das Purana Pañcalaksana, versuch einer textgeschichte", Bonn, 1927) who worked in this direction, has contributed a lot to make clear that the whole puranic system derives from one original Purāna.

R.C. Hazra in his *Puranic records* (part I. chap. 2.) has divided the eighteen *Mahapuranas* into two main categories from the point of view of their genuineness and spuriousness. According to him, there are seven major Purāṇas and eleven minor Puranas. The former retain much of their older material whereas the latter have been subjected to the interfering hands of later redactors and lost their earlier forms and contents.

2. Authorship of the Puranas

The authorship of the Puranas is attributed by some to the sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana but *Bhavisya* speaks of separate authorship for different Puranas. According to this authority the *Lingapurāṇa* was composed by the sage Tandi. But this statement of *Bhavisya* is not supported by internal evidence, although Purana suggests the theory of separate authorship.

3. Date of the Lingapurana

Puranas in general are of encyclopaedic nature. The incorporation of the different topics in them is spread over a few centuries. Hence it is very difficult to arrive at a definite date regarding the composition of the text of a Purana as a whole. Except for the material which is common to all the Puranas like the *Dharmasastra* material of the sections the dates can be discussed only severally for those sections. Regarding these common portions, so far as the *Lingapurana* is concerned, Hazra has shown that it has borrowed them from other Puranas and improved upon the borrowed sections, with additions and alterations in such a way that they at once show the indebtedness of the *Lingapurana* dealing with different subject matters as composed in stages, probably between the 7th and 9th centuries. The *Lingapurana* has preserved some of the material found in the older Puranas like the *Vāyu* or *Matsya*. It may be said that after a gradual process of assimilation of the different materials, it has grown into the present form by about the 10th century A.D.

4. Authenticity of the text of the Lingapurana

It has been shown by Hazra that the present Lingapurana is apocryphal, on the basis of the absence of verses quoted by the early writers on *dharma* as missing from the Lingapurana.

The extant Lingapurana is not the same as the original which was recited by Siva in the *Agnikalpa* to Brahma and was later on divided by Vyasa into two parts. For, the *Agnikalpa* text, according to the *Naradiya*, contained 11,000 verses, a fact acknowledged by the author of the extant Lingapurana, while actually the present Venkatesvara edition has only 9,185 verses. Further more, contrary to the statement of the *Naradiya* the present text deals with matters of *Isanakalpa* and not with those of *Agnikalpa*. It can, therefore, be presumed that there was an old Lingapurana text based upon the *Agnikalpa* on which the *Naradiya* description is based.

5. Linga

The word "Linga" is of austic origin, meaning a digging stick or primitive plough. Since both the plough and the phallus prepare the way for "insemination", the term "Linga" is also applied to the phallus and to the regenerative religious symbol, particularly the phallic emblem of the god Siva.

The word "Linga" is used in many senses. The most important and fundamental meaning of the word, is a mark or symbol. Even in respect of the meaning phallus, it means only a mark. The meaning of a mark distinguishing one sex from another, is a further derivation of the primary meaning. In its usage all over Sanskrit literature, this primary meaning has always been kept in view even when applied to a form of Siva. It is this primary meaning that is predominantly kept in view, as seen from its occurrence in different places in the *Vāyu*, *Kurma*, *Linga* and *Siva Puranas*.

Chap. 3 of the first book of the Lingapurana is important in respect of the meanings in which the word

Linga is used in connection with Siva. The word is used here in the sense of a visible symbol. And the absolute form of Siva which is beyond all visible forms is therefore called "Linga" (that which has no visible symbol) and as the basis of any later manifestation of any visible form (Linga).

Linga worship today takes many forms. The Linga image may be of stone, metal, earth or wood. Sometimes a "Kshanikalinga" (temporary Linga) for ephemeral use, made of cow-dung, butter, sandal wood paste, grass, flour and jaggery, is set up on an altar and is worshipped. Linga in the form of a column, arising out of *yonī* (vaginal passage), is set up in temples dedicated to Siva. Formerly twelve lingas existed, of which the best known are Somanatha in Gujarat, Mahakala at Ujjayini and Visvesvara at Varanasi.

6. The title "Lingapurana"

The Lingapurana is a Saiva purana. It derives its name from the fact that it reveals the supreme Lord Siva in his "niskala" (without attributes) and "sakala" (qualified) forms, recounts his emblems, qualities, exploits and incarnations, narrates legends on the origin and importance of Linga - his phallic idol, dwells upon the merits of installing and consecrating it, describes the rituals and philosophical principles of the linga cult and embodies sermons and dissertations on the glory of the linga image.

In conformity with its name, the lingapurana devotes great attention to the description of the form of Linga, the origin of the Linga worship and the merits of the worship of the Linga. The origin of the Linga and its worship have been a subject of great controversy. Some associate the linga-cult with that of the phallus. Some hold that the Linga worship originated from the aborigines of India and some that the association of the *lingatattva* with the worship of Siva Rudra was alien to the Aryans. Several scholars have repudiated these views. It has been said that the worship of the tree was later preserved in the form of a stump

of a tree ("Kandu" in Tamil), which was later replaced by a stone pillar, which took the final shape as the linga. According to those who do not accept the phallic symbolism of *Sivalinga*, the concept of linga is said to have had its origin from the hymn in the Atharva Veda, sung in praise of the *Skambha* or pillar. Among the scholars who have examined the phallic theory and canvassed the vedic origin may be mentioned, C.V. Narayana Iyer, author of *Origin and Early History of Saivism in South India*.

7. Contents of the Lingapurana

The Lingapurana is divided into two sections comprising respectively 108 and 55 chapters. Section one describes the evolution of Linga, a phallic form of Siva. It records traditions about the rise of Linga cult, modes of worshipping Linga, principles of its ritual, efficacy of its worship illustrated by myths, legends and anecdotes. It provides a graphic account of the geography of the earth with seven continents, their flora and fauna, their people, mountains, oceans and rivers. It describes the size of the earth, stars and planets, their positions and movements in the heavens. It recounts the genealogies of some famous monarchs of the solar and lunar dynasties. It gives an account of prominent *Asuras*, their expeditions and destruction.

Section two contains legends of the glorification of the Linga, a detailed account of the form of concept and attributes of Linga and the *Vratas*; gifts and *mantras* related to his worship. Finally it explains in detail the procedure of the *Pasupata yoga* as the means of attaining the ultimate goal, viz., the absorption of the personal soul into the supreme soul - Lord Siva.

The Linga and Siva Puranas depict the controversy between Brahma and Vishnu each claiming superiority over the other, consequent upon which an all pervading and mysterious Linga was observed by them. The Linga is associated in the same description with Siva and it is remarked that the Linga-worship was established among the people since then. The significant addition of these

Puranas is thus their reference to the worship of Linga, which points to the further growth of the original idea and emergence of the Linga cult. A verse of the Lingapurana, occurring in these descriptions relates that the Linga is Mahesvara himself and it is so called because it makes (him) imperceptible (for the mortal eye). The meaning of the verse makes it highly probable that the allusion here is to the incomprehensible and imperceptible form of Siva in the status of the Supreme. Being described in the *Bhagavata* as possessed of the three lingas i.e. *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* which envelop or cover him so that his course is not comprehensible. According to these passages, therefore, the Linga is indicative of an attribute of Siva, and the conception of Linga being the generative organ of Siva seems absent in them. The term "Linga" signifies a special attribute called "tamas" without which the other two attributes "rajas" and "sattva" are not in a position to operate actively and successfully in generating matter contributing to the formation of the universe.

8. General characteristics of the Lingapurana

i) Creation

The supreme Lord Siva is represented by the half-male and half-female form. At creation, the male form enters into the womb of the female form and lays the golden seed therein. The seed is of the nature of fire, the creative force and is permeated by a creative potency. According to the Lingapurana this creative energy is personified as Brahma; the recipient of the seed, the foetus is named Visnu while the sower of the seed is Lord Siva himself. Thus, the half man and half woman form of the Lord is both the efficient and the material cause of the universe.

The seed is sentient. When it enters into the womb, it activates and gives impetus to the insentient *Prakṛti*. The Cosmic Egg is born, out of which is evolved the entire universe. In fact both the insentient *Prakṛti* and the sentient principle, belong to Lord Siva himself, who out of sheer will creates, dissolves and then recreates and redissolves the universe. In this eternal process everything created in

the feminine form is *Prakṛti* and everything masculine is *Purusha*. The half-man and half-woman body (*ardhanarīśvara*) of Siva is responsible for the origin of creation by copulation.

As stated above, the creative force is of the nature of *agni* (fire) and its forty-nine forms, constitute the different forms of the supreme Lord who in his qualified (*Sakala*) state is characterised by three functions, viz., creation, sustenance and dissolution.

The constituents of *Prakṛti*, the material cause of the universe, are 23 in number. They are: Intellect, ego, five subtle elements, five senses of action, five senses of knowledge, five gross elements and the mind.

The unevolved *Prakṛti* is called *pradhana*. This set of 24 principles is insentient and to this is added a three-fold set of sentient beings, viz., *Jiva* (the individual soul), *Purusha* (the cosmic soul) and the supreme soul, Siva. In this formulation, *pradhana* is the source of the 23 principles referred to above. *Jiva* is the knower of *pradhana*; *Purusha* has the perception of the two lower categories, viz., *Jiva* and *pradhana*, but he cannot bestow grace; Lord Mahesvara alone is omnipotent and is capable of bestowing grace. In this context, *Prakṛti* is *apratibuddha*. *Jiva* is *buddhiman*, *Purusha* is *buddha* and Mahesvara is *prabuddha*. All the above-mentioned principles (26) emanate from the *saptavimsaka* (the 27th principle), viz., Lord Mahesvara.

Purusha is represented as a passive spectator of the working of *Prakṛti*. He is distinguished from the personal soul, *Jiva*, as the latter is the enjoyer of the fruits of the world-tree. Lord Mahesvara is beyond *pradhana* and *Purusha*. In his one half, i.e., the masculine form, he is devoid of qualities (*niskala*) but his other half (*sakala*) he is characterised by three attributes: *Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* which are personified as Brahma, Visnu and Rudra.

The entire phenomenon of creation is symbolized by the phallic image (*Linga*) of Lord Siva.

According to the *Lingapurana*, *pradhana*, the primary

unevolved matter, the cause of the universe is Linga itself. At the root of the Linga, the creator Brahma is stationed; Visnu the sustainer of the world is stationed in the middle; Rudra the annihilator is stationed above. Lord Siva is its sub-stratum. He permeates and imparts impetus to Linga and effects the work of creation in this way.

The Puranic cosmology divides creation into nine classes, arranged in three groups — Primary, secondary and primary-secondary. According to the 'Lingapurana this set of three-fold creation was unable to create. Then out of his body Brahma produced eleven sons; still creation made no progress. There Brahma divided himself into two forms one half a woman and the other half a man. In that half-form of a woman he created a couple - Manu and Satarupa who obeyed the creator and began the work of creation.

11) Dissolution and re-creation (Pratisarga)

The creation of the universe is not a permanent feature, for all creations end in dissolutions which in turn give place to re-creation. Thus there are several dissolutions — minor and major.

As the Puranas relate, a creation lasts for a day of Brahma, equal to a *kalpa*, a period of 4.32 million years of mortals. A *kalpa* consists of fourteen *manvantaras*. Thus, a day of Brahma, equal to a *kalpa* contains dissolutions. But these are partial dissolutions. At the end of the *manvantaras*, equal to a day of Brahma that lasts for a *kalpa*, there occurs a great dissolution. There is also a complete dissolution when Brahma has completed his life time. At the advent of this dissolution (*Prākṛta Pralaya*), the mobile and immobile beings — devas, asuras, serpents, raksasas, etc., are all destroyed. Everything dissolves itself into *Prakṛti* which remains hidden in the supreme Lord Siva. The Lord alone survives; there is no second being anywhere.

At the advent of re-creation after dissolution, Lord Siva is present in two forms. *Prakṛti* and *ātman*. Lord Visnu adopts the body of *prakṛti* and lies in the yogic couch

in the midst of waters. Then Brahma is born of his umbilical lotus. Brahma asks Siva to grant him the power to recreate.

iii) Age of Manus (Manvantaras)

Creation is divided into time-units called *kalpas*, *manvantaras*, *yugas*, *samvatsaras* and other relatively bigger and smaller units. When creation ceases to exist these time-units disappear as a matter of course. The description of the time-unit *manvantara* is one of the many characteristics of a *Mahapurana*. A *manvantara* comprises above 71 *caturyugas* equal to 1200 years of the gods or 1/14th day of Brahma. The 14 *Manvantaras* make up one whole day of Brahma equal to a *kalpa*. After each *manvantara* there is a mini-dissolution. Thus, a day of Brahma has 14 dissolutions and re-creations. The scheme of 14 dissolutions repeats itself for one age of Manu to another. The Puranas mention 14 *manvantaras*. These derive their names from the successive progenitors and sovereigns of the earth. The present Purana mentions 14 Manus by name: 1. *Svayambhuva*, 2. *Svarocisa*, 3. *Uttama*, 4. *Tāmasa*, 5. *Raivata*, 6. *Caksusa*, 7. *Vaivasvata*, 8. *Sīvarani*, 9. *Dharma*, 10. *Savarnika*, 11. *Pisanga*, 12. *Apisangabha*, 13. *Sabala*, 14. *Varnaka*. On their nomenclature the Puranas are not unanimous.

iv) Genealogy and history of royal houses (Vamsa and Vamsanucarita)

Genealogy and history of kings and illustrious personages play an important role in the *Mahapuranas*. The *Sutas* were the custodians of genealogical records which they learnt by rote and which they recited at sessional sacrifices. But in the course of oral transmission from one generation to another, some variations entered in these records. Moreover there were traditional variations too, for different versions existed in different families of *Sūtas*. When the records were incorporated in the *Puranās*, the interpolations and the traditional variations also settled therein. This explains the difference that exists in the genealogical records of the Puranic literature.

The *Lingapurana* is not interested in recording the genealogies of ancient royal houses and illustrious per-

sonages. Still, it contains in 5 chapters, a list of the solar and lunar dynasties of Ayodhya and Prayaga. Chapters 65-66 deal with the solar dynasty of Ayodhya from Vaivasvata Manu to Satyavrata, from Satyavrata to Sagara and from Sagara to Brhadbala. Chapters 67-69 recount the lunar dynasty of Prayaga from Aila Pururavas to Yayati, from Yayati to Jyamagha and from Jyamagha to Sri Kṛṣṇa. As for the history of reigning monarchs (*Vamsānucarita*), it is interested mainly in the records of the solar and lunar dynasties. It recounts the deeds of some monarchs of these houses. Amongst these, Sagara, Yayati, Jyamagha and Sri Kṛṣṇa figure prominently, while Dhundhumara, Babhru, Satrajit, Akrura and others occupy a secondary place.

4) Monism of Siva and the means of soul's release

The above analysis demonstrates that the *Lingapurana* possesses the conventional characters of a *Mahapurāṇa*. But its real greatness lies in expounding the monistic background of Saiva Philosophy especially in the context of the Linga cult.

The Linga is described as two-fold: gross and subtle. The subtle linga is the 4th state of the soul and beyond, in which the other states merge, losing their identity. The gross Linga, made of clay, wood, stone, crystal etc., is meant just to create a feeling of devotion in the gross-minded people. In fact Lord Siva, like ether, is an indivisible centre whose division of "sakala" and "niskala" forms, as of ether, into *ghatakasa* and *mahakasa*, is illusory. Even the state of being one (*Ekatva*) is not present there as a distinct attribute. Similarly, in relation to the *tattvas*, he is placed in the 27th category, but the *tattvas* too emanate from him: they are the products of his power of projection (*Prakṛti* or *maya*). He is related to them as gold is related to the ornaments or the ocean to the waves. The group of 24 forms a noose which binds the individual and cosmic souls, categorised as the 25th and 26th principles. A major portion of the *Lingapurana* is concerned with the suppression of illusion through the attainment of knowledge by means of *Pasupata Yoga*, accompanied by purificatory and expiatory rites and acts of physical and mental worship

with the *tantra*, *mantra*, and *yantra* appliances. A particular emphasis is laid upon self-purification. Along with the purification of the three *gunas*, viz., *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, the Purana enjoins the purification of the fivefold set of *tattvas*, viz., *yauvana* (five gross elements), *pada* (five subtle elements), *varna* (five organs of knowledge), *matra* (five organs of action) and *kaladhavara* (fourfold group consisting of intellect, ego, consciousness and mind). These practices, accompanied by mental concentration, are said to help the aspirant to achieve spiritual enlightenment and attain release from the entanglement of the senses and his absorption into the Supreme Soul.

9. Conclusion

The whole field of Saivism with its several internal questions and problems forms an important and interesting field of research. A detailed critical study of the *Lingapurana* is sure to shed much light on these problems. Since the beginning of Sanskrit studies, scholars like H.H. Wilson, Haraprasad Sastri and Willibald Kirfel have contributed a lot to the study of the Puranas, but while individual studies on some of the Puranas were made, no such study of the Lingapurana has been attempted upto 1980.

Moreover, there are no complete Western translations of the *Padma*, *Vamana*, *Kurma*, *Brahmanda*, *Bhavishya*, *Linga*, *Varaha* and *Brahma Puranas*. The desideratum of the pioneer of Indology, Sir William Jones' translation of the Puranas has not yet been fulfilled (up to 1980). Nearly all the classical works are translated but the Puranas are forgotten and neglected in European Indology. Juan Roger Riviere in his "European translation of Puranic texts", considers that the Puranas are a living testimony of the religious, social and ritual evolution of Hinduism. They are till now the main sources of inspiration of the complete religious life of India. Therefore attempts must be made to fulfil the dream of Sir William Jones to preserve the Puranas for posterity.

Spirituality of the Siva Purana

Introduction : Purana and the Puranas

Hindu spirituality is succinctly summed up by the Second Vatican Council in its decree *Nostra Aetate* thus: "In Hinduism men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek release from the anguish of our condition through ascetical practices or deep meditation or a loving trusting flight toward God" (No. 2). In the Puranas which are the popular source books of the spirituality of the Hindu masses these aspects of Hindu spirituality are found.

As a human phenomenon, Purana may be said to be the primordial pre-reflective contemplation of the divine mystery by the Hindu mind and heart from their very genesis — primordial, not only chronologically but fundamentally in the ongoing consciousness of the faith experience of the Hindu even today. Tamil mystics have used several phrases to denote this ineffable experience which is the basis of their religious life. *Nōkku ariya nōkku* — look beyond looking, *nuṇukku ariya nuṇ ariṇu* — knowledge subtler than the subtlest, says Manikkavacakar who often sinks into this centering *niṇaiṇṇu ara niṇaital*, i.e., thought transcending thought.

From this basic existential experience of the Holy have evolved myths and symbols in an effort to express itself before trying to formulate it through philosophical categories and metaphysical systems. Thus the religious man everywhere and the Hindu in particular live at once on two planes: the secular simultaneously with the sacred mythical space and time. This has resulted in a multipli-

city of puranic lore: the eighteen major or Mahapuranas, the eighteen minor or upa-puranas and innumerable local puranas.

Among the eighteen Mahapuranas the Linga Purana, Agni Purana, Skanda Purana, Vamana Purana, Kūrma Purana and Vayu Purana are considered Saivite Puranas because they call the Supreme Reality by the name of Siva, and are held as authoritative *sastra* by the Saivite sect of Hinduism. The Vayu Purana is called also Siva Purana. In a broad sense all these together may be called Siva Purana.

Strictly speaking, the Siva Purana, consists of an introduction called *Siva Purana Mahatmyam* on its own glory and seven Samhitas, viz., (1) *Vidyasvara Samhita* with 25 chapters; (2) *Rudra Samhita* with 196 chapters in five *khandas*; (3) *Satarudra Samhitha* with 42 chapters; (4) *Kotirudra Samhita* with 43 chapters; (5) *Uma Samhita* with 51 chapters; (6) *Kailasa Samhita* with 23 chapters and (7) *Vayaviya Samhita* with 76 chapters¹.

Date of Siva Purana

The Puranic lore belongs to four stages of development and composition: 1) From the Vedic period to the Bharata War, i.e., from about 1200 B.C. to 950 B.C.; 2) Second is one of bifurcation, from 950 to 500 B.C.; 3) Third is the *Pancha Lakshana* stage from 500 B.C. to 1st Century A.D.; 4) Fourth is from the first Century to 700 A.D.; may be called the sectarian stage.

Now, Siva Purana mentions the Siva Sutras, which claims to have been revealed by Siva to Vasugupta who was the guru of Kallada. Kallada flourished in the reign of king Avanti-Varman of Kashmir in the 9th Century A.D. The origin of Siva Sutras therefore was in the beginning of the 9th Century or the last part of the 8th Century A.D. Some scholars therefore hold that Siva Purana which mentions Siva Sutra is later than 9th Century².

1. Translated by a Board of Scholars, edited by Prof. J.L. Shastri and published in four volumes by Motilal Banarsidass 1970-73.

2. Cf. Purana Vol. VII, no. 1, pp. 158-169.

Saivite spirituality has to be based not only on Siva Purana but also on all puranas considered Saivite, the Saivite Agamas as well as the canon of Saivite works etc. If we take each purana separately for a study of its spirituality there may be grave omissions and needless repetitions.

Saivite spirituality

Man does not awake to consciousness as a purely secular being. In his genesis he experiences the awe as well as the fascination in the presence of the *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans* or the Holy, as Rudolf Otto put it. The Hindu wakes to the consciousness of himself as *asat* with an aspiration to be made *Sat*. The primordial prayer "Asato ma sad gamaya" is not only spiritual but also ontological aspiration. This aspiration itself, as Christian existentialists like Gabriel Marcel would tell us, is what constituted man's initial reality. The Saivite with this conviction defines himself as *sadasat* in the face of the noumenal which he experiences as "wholly the Other" with whom however paradoxically he aspires to an advaitic experience even through the *Sivoham* (I am Sivam) *bhavana*. The Self-manifestation of the Holy as the hierophany of Siva is the foundation of Saivite spirituality:

Living in sacred space the mystery of Lingodbhava Murti

Divine events originate in sacred or mythical space and time. They become present to us through our liturgical celebrations. Saivite spirituality is based on the mythical phenomenon of the *Lingodbhava Murti* and the daily cult that has evolved from it. The incomprehensibility and inaccessibility of the Ultimate Reality is forcefully inculcated by the puranic parable of the *Lingodbhava Murti* which is sculptured on the outside centre of the western wall of the Central Shrine, *Moolasthan* or *Garbhagriha* of every Saiva temple in South India if it faces the East.

The cosmic pillar

The incomprehensibility of Siva even to Vishnu and Brahma is the basic belief that sets apart the Saivite

from the believers of any other sect of the Hindus. *Vinnaha-t-tēvarum nannavum maṭṭa Viḷupporuḷē* (O transcendent being inaccessible even to the celestial gods) sings Tiruvacakam echoing the ancient Babylonian hymn: "Thy Name, O Lord, is a pillar reaching beyond the heavens; thy Name O Lord, is a pedestal spreading beyond the world". This witnesses to the experience of the Holy as filling and transcending the universe vertically and horizontally. That this experience is a world-wide phenomenon is also witnessed by the worship among various ancient peoples of the Pillars and Sacred Poles etc³.

The Siva Purana *Vidyasvarasamhita* (chapter seven) describes the manifestation of Siva as a Column of Fire in the battlefield between Visnu and Brahma to teach them truth and humility.

In the same Siva Purana, *Umasamhita* (chapter 49) Siva, the Eternal Feminine, the embodied form of mercy, existence, knowledge and bliss manifested herself as a mass of splendour and enlightened the gods saying "I am Brahman". She is Uma. She is Sati, the Real. She is *Mahamaya*, Eternal *Prakṛti*.

The cosmic *Purusha* is said to be "A-Linga", i.e., without any characterising mark. He is considered the Cause of causes and so inconceivable. It is, therefore, said that he cannot be the object of worship. A form of the formless, a mark of the markless, a *linga* of the *A-Linga* must serve for receiving the worship of creatures. Siva being formless is possessed of all forms and hence pervades all things in all the worlds embodied or disembodied and may be worshipped in a formless form as he has been for thousands of years.

Saiva Siddhanta system, therefore, has conceived the Linga as a combination of *Nada* ((sound represented by the vertical) and *Bindu*, a dot (represented by a horizontal plane or pedestal) and calls this combination by the name

3. Cf. T.A Gopinatha Rao; *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II. Part I, p. 70 footnote.

of *Sadakhya*. Now, the meaning of *akhya*, is "appellation, aspect, name, appearance". *Sadakhya*, therefore, would seem to mean the communication or revelation of reality, here of Absolute Reality. Hence the Siva Purana (*Vidyavarasamhita* 16:88) declares that the "universe is pervaded and sustained by Nada and Bindu". The Linga or *Sadakhya* as revelation of the Ultimate Reality is the eternal benign and beneficent *Sadasiva* who receives the highest worship of all beings. It is the mass of splendour of the Lord, it is the "glory of the Lord", it is the Name of the Lord identical with the Lord. Siva Purana (loc cit vv. 113-114) says that the combination of Nada and Bindu makes the *Om* *karā* or *Pranava* which it calls by the name of *Dhvani Linga* or the evocative sound symbol. (Of this we shall speak later.)

Anthropomorphically the Siva Purana describes and narrates the Lingodbhava event: the dispute between Brahma and Vishnu as a veritable battle (loc cit c. 5), the devas fleeing to Kailasa to beseech the Supreme Lord Siva to intervene (c. 6), the appearance of the Column of Fire between Vishnu and Brahma, the former's effort to find the root of the mysterious Column, the latter's effort to find its top, the reward to Vishnu for owning his inability, the punishment meted out to Brahma for dishonesty and final forgiveness. Siva proclaimed as *Mahesvara* (ch 9) says, "The day I manifested myself in the form of a column of fire is the *Ardra* star in the month of *Margarisra* (v. 15)". And it is a great celebration at Chidambaram on that day; and "since the emblem rose high resembling a mountain of fire, this shall be famous as *Arunachala*" (v. 21). This is the majestic awe-inspiring hill at Tiruvannamalai which has been made famous by the great *Nayanmars* and the mystic poet *Arunagirinathar* and recently by the Saint *Ramana Maharishi*. (A footnote however in SP in this place says that the *Arunachala* lies to the west of Kailasa). *Saivites* hold in highest honour the *Svayambhuva* (self-existent) *Linga*. "Siva in the form of *Nada* is believed to assume the form of a seed under the ground, suddenly piercing the ground above like a germinating sprout, manifesting himself outside and making his presence felt. Since this emblem is self-raised it is called *Svayambhu*" (*Siva Purana, Vidyas-*

vara Samhita ch. 18:32-33). Wherever this is found, the walls of *garbhagriha* are built around it along with the surrounding temple complex⁴.

Between such *Svayambhu Linga* and *Kshanika Linga* (made just for a single act of worship and destroyed once it is over,) there are several classes of god-made, rishi-made and man-made lingas of various materials, like gold, silver, pearl and precious stones, stones polished by rivers, wood etc. Siva Purana Umasamhita (c. 44) narrates how Veda Vyasa, on his birth from Satyavati went on a pilgrimage to all the sacred shrines where Linga was worshipped (vv. 55 fol.).

The cult of the Linga

For a devout Saivite every act of his or her day to day life is to be an offering made to Siva, *Īsvara-pranidana*. Siva Purana, *Vaiyaviya samhita* (Section II ch. 21) describes the *nitya* (daily) and *naimitya* (occasional) rites. "He shall rise early in the morning and meditate on the Lord and the goddess", prescribes verse two, and then gives the *sauca* rules of external purity.

Verse five speaks of the *Ācamana* and the bath. In the *Ācamana* the trident of Siva which is the symbol of his grace is meditated as descending into the water and turning it into *Pāvana-tirta*, purifying water. Sipping it with *mantras* the devotee meditates how he is being purified by Siva's grace. During the bath he performs the rites of *tarpana*, propitiation. The bath is followed by the *Samdhya Vandana*, *Samdhya* means meeting. The ancients considered three meeting points in a day, viz., day-break, noon and sun-down. What is called *Samdhya Vandana* is a combination of many little rites divided into two main parts, the *jala bhaga* and the *japa bhaga*. The *Jala bhaga* contains the *ācamana* etc. and the *pranayama*. The *pranayama* is not merely the re-

4. T.A. Gopinatha Rao, *Op. cit.* Vol. II, Part I, pp 82-85 mentions sixty eight places all over India wherein *Svayambhuva Lingas* are said to be found.

gulation of breath but the control of the fivefold forces of *prāṇa* or soul. It is an exercise at once physical, mental, psychic and spiritual. This is followed by *sankalpa*. In *sankalpa* God is invoked by a process of concentration and resolution and the devotee renews his intention to perform an act of worship spreading out his mind through space and time as a cosmic liturgy. Next comes *prokshana* or sprinkling of water, then *arghya* or offering of water. The second part, the *Japa bhaga* begins by several invocations. Finally comes the *Gayatri mantra* for which all that has preceded are only preparations. The *Gayatri mantra* consists of three parts: *prāṇava*, *vyahritis* and then the *mantra* itself: *Aum, bhur bhuvah svah*

Tat Savitūr varēṇyam

Bhargo dēvasya dhimahi

Dio yo naḥ pracodayat.

The *prāṇava Aum*, is considered as constituting and indicating the whole universe, its creation, preservation and destruction. The three syllables A,U,M, which compose the single sound Om are variously interpreted by scholars but give the same experience to the devout. What are called *vyahritis*, i.e., *bhuḥ, bhuvah, svah* stand as symbols of the entire universe. *Gayatri* is one of the Vedic metres of versification; it has come to be regarded as a female deity, as the very spirit of the universe. Different schools give different rules for reciting the *Gayatri japa*. It simply affirms that one is meditating on that life-giving adorable splendour of the Deity and the prayer that it may kindle and enhance one's intelligence. The *Gayatri* deity is ceremoniously invited by what is called *avāhana* and after the *japa*, is given the leave-taking. This is the *Saivite Samdhya* which is obligatory on initiated *Saivite* even if he omits the *Vaidic Samdhya* which is somewhat different from it. The *Siva Purana* also prescribes certain substitutes for those who are prevented from taking bath. Then it prescribes the rite of applying *bhasma*, the sacred ashes on the forehead and other parts of the body. This is followed by wearing the *Rudraksha* bead. Chapters 24, 25, 26 describe the ritual of the full worship of *Śiva* and its ancillary rites.

The same Purana, *Kailasa samhita* (c. 7) describes the ceremonial public worship of Siva in the temple. The *vidyes-varasamhita* (chapter 11) explicitly speaks of the worship of the Linga.

The Saiva Agamas have further specified the cult into two kinds of *puja*: the *Atmartha puja* performed seated meditatively in the puja room at home, and the *Parartha puja* or *Seva* performed standing in the temple by those who have received the proper *diksha* for it, which has to be preceded by the *Atmartha puja* at home.

The Puja

The first part of the puja is an elaborate rite of purification consisting of various *suddhis*. The main part of the worship consists of various *upacaras* or royal welcome. The *sōdōpacara* or sixteen rubrics of welcoming and entertaining a royal (or divine) guest, viz., (1) *Āvahana* (invocation), (2) *Āsana*, offering seat, (3) *Ārghya*, water-offering, (4) *Padya*, foot-washing, (5) *Ācamana*, water-sipping, (6) *Abhyanga Snana*, oil-bath, (7) *Vastra*, offering of vestments, (8) *Gandha*, scent-offering, (9) *Pushpa*, flower-offering, (10) *Dhupa*, incense, (11) *Dipa*, light-offering, (12) *Nivedana*, offering of food etc., (13) *Nirajana*, waving of lighted camphor, (14) *Tambula*, (15) *Namaskara*, obeisance, and (16) *Visarjana*, mystical send-off. In addition to the *sōdōpacara* there are various *abhishekas*, anointing with various materials. This is followed by *japa* with the *praṇava mantra* which leads to *samādhi*. Thus through rituals, accompanied by deepening meditation the worshipper attains *samādhi*. If the latter is missed the rest becomes mere ritualism. With it, every act becomes holy. One should therefore study the significance of *Om* or *Praṇava*.

Living in sacred time: Chidambara Rahasyam, the mystery of Nataraja

Poetry, music and dance are said to be time arts. They have been used to make sacred and mythical events present and act on us here and now. They have grown with us from the beginning of Indian history, and *muttamīl*, i.e., *iyal* (literature), *icai* (music), and *nataka* (dance

drama) developed from *Sangam* Tamil age.

"Like yoga", says Zimmer, "the dance induces ecstasy, the experience of the divine, realization of one's own secret nature and finally the mergence into the divine essence." And since dance is an act of creation Siva had to be developed into the Cosmic Dancer and as *Nritya Murti*, he embodies in himself and simultaneously gives manifestation of eternal energy. Siva Purana is well versed in dance and drama. All the descriptions it gives of Siva's great deeds are elaborate dramatizations with long drawn-out dialogues. Thus the *Rudra Samhita*, *Yuddha Khanda* (section V) gives a dramatic presentation of the destruction of the three cities, *Tripuradhahana*, all the celestial beings having been assembled to build the Cosmic Chariot and the weapons of Siva. Similarly *Kamantaka* episode too finds elaborate dramatization⁵. And scores of such exploits are thus choreographically represented. But nowhere in the Siva Purana is it said that Siva himself expressed these by performing a dance. That Bharata's *Natya Sastra* is known to the contributors of Siva Purana is evident from the case of Bana who when converted is said to have gone to the temple of Siva and there to have performed the *tandava* assuming poses and postures like *alida*, *sthanaka*, *pratyalida* etc.

About Chidambaram, some scholars hold that the Linga Cult was earlier there, others that the Nataraja cult was the older of the two. The Patanjali legend makes *Vyagrapada* lead Muni Patanjali to the Linga of Chidambaram only to find himself caught up in the dance Siva performs there. The synthesis comes by making Nataraja ask them to worship the Linga.

The *Kūrma Purāna* (Part II Adh. 5) makes Vyāsa say, "The Lord, Supreme God... saying this much to the yogins, started *dancing* exhibiting his divine nature". It makes also the great rishis see "Isana, the Great God, the excellent repository (of divine radiance) dancing with Vishnu in the

5. *Parvati Knanda*, section III, c, 19.

spotless sky". It adds, "They saw in the sky Rudra the Great Liberator ... dancing ... Then the sages ... seeing Lord Rudra who controls the universe with his left half as Padmanabha (Narayana) meditated on him in their hearts... pronouncing *Om* ... the *Om* which is the very seed of salvation ... you are Vishnu ... you are God Rudra". It is a dance in the sky (*Paramakasa madhyē*). It is a dance of bliss, *Ānandatandava*⁶. The Kurma Purana finally states explicitly⁷ that he dances in the heart.

In the Siva Purāṇa, Siva appearing before Mena is described as *equal* to a dancer⁸. Tamil classical literature which refers frequently to the great exploits of Siva never mentions that he himself performed any dance. But the Cosmic Dancer has emerged from all these references. And no spirituality can be called Saivite if it leaves out Nataraja representation, references to which multiplied only during the medieval period. The temple in Chidambaram has been in building for over 1300 years (from 6th to 19th Century A.D.) and the oldest remnant of the shrine seems to be the *Nritya Sabha*, the Dance Hall. During this long time Bharata's *Nāṭya Sāstra* was studied in depth and practised and the laws and rules of *Silpa Sastra* were applied in art and architecture first by the Pallavas during the time of Nayanmars and then by the great Cholas and finally by the Pandians. Bharata's *Nāṭya Sāstra* teaches 108 dance poses (Karanas) which have been depicted in stone in the Eastern gopuram of Chidambaram Temple⁹.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy drew the attention of the whole world by his book "Dance of Siva". "How amazing" he says¹⁰, "the range of thought and sympathy of these *rishi* artists who first conceived such a type as this, affording an image of reality, a key to the complex tissue of life, a theory of nature, not merely satisfactory to a single clique or race,

6. *Adh. cit.* v. 27.

7. *loc cit.* v. 25.

8. Sivaramamurti, *Nataraja*, p. 160.

9. Cf. *Tandava Laksanam* by B. V. Narayanaswami Naidu Introduction

10. "Dance of Siva" by Ananda Coomaraswamy, p. 56-66.

nor acceptable to the thinkers of one century only but universal in its appeal to the philosopher, the lover and the artist of all ages and all centuries! How supremely great in power and grace this dancing image must appear to all those who have striven in plastic forms to give expression to their intuition of life! No artist of today, however great, could more exactly and more wisely create an image of that energy which science must postulate behind all phenomena. It is not strange that the figure of Nataraja has commanded the adoration of so many generations past: we, familiar with all scepticism, expert in tracing all beliefs to primitive superstitions, explorers of the infinitely great and infinitely small, are worshippers of Nataraja still".

"Whatever the origins of Siva's dance", wrote Doomaswami elsewhere, "it became in time the noblest image of activity of God which any art or religion can boast of." Then he describes three of Siva's dances: the *Samdhya* in the Himalayas with a divine chorus, then the *tandava* as found in Ellora etc., that was later interpreted in Saiva or *Sakta* literature. And thirdly the *nadanta* dance of Nataraja before the assembly in the golden hall of Chidambaram or Tillai as related in the *Koil Puraṇam*. The legend of the *Mimamsaka rishis* of the *Taraka* forest near Chidambaram provided the *Aharya* and the *Abhinayas* (i.e., the make-up ornaments, weapons, instruments, poses and postures) of the Divine Dancer of Chidambaram which served as model for all the *Natarajas* of South India: the tiger skin round the waist, the serpents as peaceful ornaments, and the *Muyalaka* or *Apasmara* dwarf as the symbol of ignorance and epileptic forgetfulness which is suppressed to be replaced by knowledge and wisdom. The bull is a symbol of evil passions in East India and so Siva crushes it there dancing on its back. But in Tamilnadu the bull is *Ara Viḍai*, Symbol of *Dharma* and also of the just and pure soul which the Lord uses as his *Vahana* to achieve his purposes.

Pancakritya

The unmanifested omnipotence of the Ultimate Reality, *Para Sakti*, goes fourth as *Arul Sakti*, the all-Powerful-

ness of Grace in its triple aspects of *Ichha Sakti*, *Jnana Sakti* and *Kriya Sakti*. And this *Kriya Sakti* manifests itself in the fivefold activities of *Srishti*, creation, *Sthiti*, Preservation, *Samhara*, involution, *Tirodhana*, obscuration and *Anugraha*, final salvation. These are symbolized by the Cosmic Drum of creation, the *Abhaya hasta* (fear-not pose) of preservation of the universe, the Cosmic Flame of involution in the left rear hand, the planted foot which notes the play of obscuration in the economy of Saivite salvation and the raised foot, the *Carama Padam*, the hope of all souls for final salvation pointed out by the *Danda hasta* of the left front hand. Zimmer becomes poetic¹¹: "The forces gathered and projected in his frantic ever-enduring gyration are the powers of evolution, maintenance, and dissolution of the world. Nature and all its creatures are the effects of his eternal dance. The ring of flame or *Prabha mandala*. (*Tiruvaci*) issues from and encompasses Siva. It signifies energy of Wisdom, transcendental light of knowledge of truth, dancing forth from the personification of All. The holy syllable *Om* ("Aye" Amen) is also an expression and affirmation of the totality of creation." "*Om*kara came out of my mouth" declares Siva to Brahma and Vishnu¹².

"Our Lord is the Dancer who, like the heat latent in firewood, diffuses his power in mind and matter and makes them dance in their turn."¹³ Coomaraswami compares this with Eckhart: "Just as the fire infused the essence and clearness into the dry wood so has God done with man".

"Now to summarise the whole interpretation", says Coomaraswami, "we find that the essential significance of Siva's Dance is three-fold: first, it is the image of his rhythmic activity as the Source of all movement within the Cosmos which is represented by the arch (*Prabhavali* = *Tiruvaci*); secondly the purpose of his Dance is to release

11. *Myths and Symbols*, p. 152.

12. *Siva Purana Vidyeshvara Samhita*, ch. 10, V. 17.

13. *Tiruvata-vurar Puranam* quoted by J. M. Nallaswami Pillai, *Sivajnana-bodham*, p. 75.

the countless souls of men from the snare of illusion; thirdly the place of the Dance, Chidambaram the Centre of the Universe, is within the Heart".

In the concrete plastic representations, the devout Saivite sees several poses and postures of dances. Some Tamil works speak of seven *Tāṇḍavas*, viz., *Ananda Tāṇḍava*, *Samdhya Tāṇḍava*, *Uma Tāṇḍava*, *Gauri Tāṇḍava*, *Kalika Tāṇḍava*, *Tripura Tāṇḍava* and *Samhara Tāṇḍava*. Other works classify them as Dance of Omnipotence, the Dance of Immanence, the Dance of Time and Eternity and the Dance of Omni-science¹⁴. Siva's Dance Hall with the stage arranged is called *Sabha* and the Dancer is called *Sabha-pati*. *Adri Sabha* is on the Himalayas where Siva performs the *Gauri Tāṇḍava* to be enjoyed by *Gauri*, the Mother of the three worlds. He is *Adrisabhapati*. The *Adichitsabha* is in *Tiruvenkadu* near *Siyāḷi*. *Ratnasabha* is in *Tiruvalankadu* and the Lord is called *Ratnasabhapati*. The *Tamrasabha*, Copper Hall, is in *Tirunelveli* near the banks of the *Tamraparani* river. *Rajatasabha* or *Vēḷḷiyambalam* (Silver Hall) is in *Ālavai* (Halasya) i.e., *Madurai* where the *Sabha-pati* *Sundaresar* is standing on his left foot and raises the right one in order to satisfy the prayer of the pious king his devotee. *Chitrasabha* is at *Kuttalam* where the *Ardhanarisvara* combines the thundering masculine *Tāṇḍava* and the lovely feminine *Lasya* into one dance.

The most celebrated one is the Golden Hall, *Kanagasabha*, *Ponnambalam* of *Chidambaram* or *Tillai* sung by mystics and poets. Just as the *Lingam* there is the mysterious invisible *Ākasa* (Ether) *Lingam*, the Dance Hall there is the *Chid-Ākasa* or *Chitsabha* in *Pundarikapura* which is the most venerated because the Prince of Dancers, *Natana Sabhapati* performs there the most mysterious Dance. The *Skanda Purāṇa* (in the *Suta samhita*) speaks of it as Dance of Bliss in the *Chidākāsa* in *hritpundarika*, the Lotus of the Heart. *Sankara* prayed to *Siva* to dance in his heart and not to hurt his feet on the rocky slopes of the Himalayas¹⁵.

¹⁴. Sivaramamurti, *op. cit.* pp. 23-25.

¹⁵. *Sivanandalahari* 64.

Siva considered as the Universal soul dancing in the Heart-Lotus is explained by Vasugupta in the *Siva Sutra* (mentioned above) which became the basic text for the *Pratyabijnā Darsana* school of Kashmir Saivism. In Chidambaram the Dance is called also *Nāḍanta* Dance transcending all *tattvas*, therefore invisible to any one except Siva's *Sakti*, but inviting the *Saiva Siddhantin* to approach through meditation which is called *Dasakarya: Tattva Rupam, tattva darsanam, tattva suddhi, Atma Rupam, atma darsanam, atma suddhi, Siva Rupam, Siva Darsanam, Siva Yogam and Siva Bhogam*. Those who obtain a vision of *Nadanta* Dance obtain advaitic union with the Ultimate Reality in Silent Plenitude.

Tirukkuttu Darisanam

The *Tirumantiram* of Tirumoolar is the authoritative encyclopaedia of Saivite spirituality, in nine Tantras and 3000 stanzas.

In the ninth *Tantra* the eighth section is entitled and treats of *Tirukkūttu Darisanam*, the vision of the Divine Dance, from stanza 2722 to 2803.

It begins saying:

"Everywhere His Sacred Body: all pervasive is *Siva Sakti* / Everywhere is Chidambaram, everywhere the Sacred Dance / Since everywhere is Siva indeed, Everywhere takes place the play of Siva's Grace". (2722)
 "Those who know not say the "First" danced / Who knows what his dance is ? / If any one has come to know the Lord's Dance (i.e., that it is in the human heart that he dances) / They know that it is his omnipotent Grace that dances." (2787)

"That the *Tattvas* may dance, / That *Sadasiva* may dance, / That the *Chitta Mandala* may dance, / That *Siva Sakti* may dance, / That the mobile and immobile universe may dance, / That the Vedas themselves may dance, / Danced the Eternal the Dance of Bliss." (2789)

The eternal feminine

Sivā is the feminine form of *Siva*. *Parai* is the femi-

nine form of *Param*. If Siva is devoid of beginning, middle or end, as the *Siva Purana* says¹⁶, *Sivā* too knows no beginning, middle or end. She is called *Uma*.

The *Guptarupi Devi* i.e., *Devi* who is unmanifested takes three forms, viz., *Lakshmi*, *Mahakali* and *Sarasvatī* representing the *Rajasa*, *Sattvika* and *Tamasa* attributes of *Prakṛti*¹⁷.

The Saivite *mumukshu* may concentrate his attention on the representations of *Umasahita*, *Sukhasana Murtis*, *Uma Mahesvara Murtis*, *Uma sahita Chandrasekara Murtis*, *Alingana Murtis* and finally *Ardhanarisvara Murtis* to realise the ever-growing magnetism and identification of the Eternal Feminine with the Lord of lords. She is called *Clauri* when considered as an unmarried girl. *Uma* becomes *Sati*, burns herself down by her yogic heat. She becomes *Parvati* and relives *Sati's* life of love of Siva. And the eternal hierogamy goes on.

As *Minakshi* at *Madurai* she is given in marriage to Siva by her brother *Vishnu*. Who is *Vishnu*? The mystery, of the Divine Biunity becomes more challenging to the created intelligence to comprehend it when the Tamil mystic *Tirunavukkarasar* alias *Appar* declares that there is no *Devi* for the Lord *Hara* (*Siva*) except *Hari*. And *Puranas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Sastras* have conspired to create *Ardha-hari*, *Harihara*, *Sankaranarayana* in stone and metal.

The *Sastras* came later to explain the myths of the *Puranas* and *Agamas* saying that one and the same Absolute Reality when considered *in se* is called *Siva* and when considered "ad extra" is called *Sakti*. *Sakti* is none other than the Compassionate Grace, the source of all creative and saving activities of Siva. This *Sakti* when considered as a psychic spiritual energy hidden in the psycho-somatic structure of the human being is called the *Kundalini Sakti* or the Grace of Siva latent and awaiting the cooperation

16. *Vayavīyasamhita*, ch. 12 v. 18

17. *Markandeya Purana* quoted by *Gopinatha Rao*, op. cit. I-II, pp 334-335

of the human being to awaken it and raise it to its zenith. The cooperation with Grace may be given either by the regulation and esoteric control of breath or it may be achieved by the *Mantra Yoga*, practice of *japa* of the proper *mantra*. Both these spiritual practices achieve *Samadhi* and advaitic union with Siva.

The Siva Purana teaches how this *Kundalini Sakti* dormant in the *Mūlādhara Chakra* at the lower end of the spinal cord is awakened, how it rises to the *Svādhishṭhāna Chakra*, thence to *Maṇipūra Chakra*, how reaching *Anahata Chakra* near the heart it turns into sound, *Anahata Sabda*; thence ascending to the *Visuddhi Chakra* it becomes *sattvic*, and higher up between the eye brows in the *Ājña Chakra* it becomes a flash of light and passing through the *Brahmarandra* mystic aperture in the crown of the head to the thousand-petalled Lotus above the head, the *Sahasrara Chakra* it transcends itself and is in full union with the Revealed Divinity. "The rest is silence."

In that silence, the Feminine is identical with the masculine. Siva is identical with Vishnu, and the most mysterious dance takes place. Sivaramamurti refers to the two shrines of Govindaraja in *sayana* pose and of Nataraja in Chidambaram and calls Vishnu's pose as static and Siva's as dynamic. There are elsewhere representations of Siva and Parvati in the abode of bliss witnessing the *Mohini* dance of Vishnu. All these attributes, we see, are interchangeable, Sivajnana Siddhiyar sums up all this mystery as follows: "Siva begets Sakti and Sakti begets Siva. Both in their happy union produce the worlds and the *Jivas*. Still *Bhava* (Siva) is a *Brahmachari* (Celibate) and the sweet-speeched Sakti remains a virgin. Sages only-comprehend this secret."

The Spirituality of the Bhagavata Purana

Traditionally the Puraṇās are expected to deal with five topics: the creation of the world, its successive re-production, the genealogies of patriarchs and kings, the epochs of Manu, and the history of royal dynasties¹. All this may seem far removed from any discussion on man's spiritual struggle. Yet the *Bhāgavata-purana* (BhP) which has "exercised a more direct influence upon the opinions and feelings of the people than any other of the Puranas"², presents itself as a guide for the spiritual pilgrim³.

The opening words of the *BhP* indicate that it intends to teach us the way of the saints, following which man will be freed from all his sorrows and be united with God. This way of sanctity demands that man not only attentively listens to this teaching, but also acts upon it⁴. The *BhP* makes a subtle suggestion that the instruction contained in it is meant for all men, of all times⁵. This instruction is the fruit of the prayer of Vyasa, the encyclopedic sage, who even though he had edited the Scriptures and composed *Mahabharata*, did not find peace of soul⁷. This was, as he him-

1. *Amarakosa*, 1.6.5.

2. Henceforth abbreviated as *BhP*.

3. H. H. Wilson: *Vishnu Purana* (Calcutta, Punthi Pustak, rep. 1972), p. xi.

5. For a more detailed exposition of this point, see S. Anand: "The Bhagavatapurana: a Guide for the Sadhaka", *Purana*, XX-1, pp. 71-86.

5. 1.1.2.

6. The *BhP* contains the instruction given by a wandering devotee of Krishna to some sages who had assembled at Animisa-ksetra (lit. the world of mortals), for a sacrifice that would last a thousand years.

7. 1.4.16-26; 1.7. 5-6.

self realized, because he had not adequately expounded the way that is dear to the *parama-hamsa*⁸.

Before describing the way, we need to understand well the goal we want to attain. Hence we will first see how the *BhP* understands the nature of God and of man. This will lead us to determine the subjective disposition needed to attain God, and also to see if this disposition is within the reach of all, even though there may be some obstacles. In this journey, man does not walk alone. He is constantly assisted by God and by other seekers. In the end we will see that the way explained by the *BhP* is not just a way, but also the anticipation of the goal itself.

God: the goal of the pilgrim

Every spirituality presupposes a theology, because the way to attain the Ultimate is determined by our understanding of the Ultimate. One of the most frequently asked question is: "Is God *saguna* or *nirguna*?" Indologists tend to translate these two words as "personal" and "impersonal" respectively". The *BhP* speaks of God as *saguna* and *nirguna*¹. But, as we have shown elsewhere, "the *BhP* ascribes to the *nirguna-brahman* those functions that are associated with a personal God. He is responsible for the creation, sustenance and consummation of the world; He is the source of revelation; Kṛṣṇa is his *avatara*; the devotee prays to Him, longs to see Him; He is pleased by this prayer and bestows His grace on him; He is the object of attachment-through-love"¹¹. Hence, in the *BhP* *nirguna* does not indicate an impersonal being, but a being that is free from all the constituents (*gunas*) of the Primal Matter

8. 1.4.31. The swan (*hamsa*) is believed to have the power of separating milk from water—thus symbolizing discernment. It is also the vehicle of Brahma, the god of learning, from whom all the Vedas (books of knowledge, come.

9. S. Radhakrishnan remarks: "Ivara, according to Samkara, is the determinate (*saguna*) Brahman regarded as the supreme personality", *Indian Philosophy*, vol. II (New York, The Macmillan Co., rep. 1962), p. 542.

10. 3.32.36.

11. S. Anand: "Saguna or Nirguna", *Purana*, XXI-1, p. 63

(*Prakṛti*)¹². Thus *nirguna* points to the transcendent character of the Ultimate. God is beyond all His creation. He cannot be adequately grasped by a created mind. Man can know God truly only when God reveals Himself¹³. In this self-revelation of God, the message comes across to us not only through what God reveals, but also through how he reveals Himself.

According to the *bhakti*-tradition, of which the *BhP* is a major spokesman, God's self-revelation finds its most powerful expression in the *avatara*. Of the many *avataras* of Vishnu, the *BhP* gives the greatest importance to Krishna, to whom it devotes two full books¹⁴. Of all the episodes in his life the one that has attracted the greatest attention is his dance with the young women of Vrindavan. All this, which at first sight appears so scandalous¹⁵, is an allegory of love. Through the figure of Krishna, the *bhakti* tradition is expressing its faith in God who is above all the great lover: God finds greater joy in our company than a young man finds in the company of young women.

Man: an embodied spirit

Man exists in this world through his body, but this body is not really his true reality¹⁶. It is fickle¹⁷, and man will have to part with it¹⁸. As man is more than his body, death is not the last event in his life¹⁹. He is an embodied spirit, a *jīva-ātman*, and as such beyond birth and death²⁰. In death only the body is destroyed; *jīva-atman* attains God²¹.

12 That we are right in understanding "*nirguna*" as "free from the three *gunas* of *prakṛti*" "becomes clear from the *Maitriupanisad*, 6.10, which contrasts the *nirguna-brahman* with the *triguna-prakṛti*.

13. God is spoken of as the highest secret. 8.7.24; 12.12.4

14. Bks 10 and 11. Of the twelve books of the *BhP*, Bk 10 is by far the most voluminous.

15. The *BhP* is well aware of this possibility. 10.33.29. For a more detailed exposition of the *BhP* understanding of God, see Anand, "Saguna or Nirguna", pp. 40-63.

16. It is the fool who identifies himself with his body. 11.19.42.

17. 3.30.3.

18. 1.13.24.

19. 12.5.3

20. 12.5.4

21. 12.5.5.

The *BhP* speaks of the *jiva-atman* as a particle of God²². The *jiva-atman* and the *parama-ātman* are companions²³. It will be difficult to say that the *EhP* has one consistent understanding of man in relation to God. Some scholars have offered an advaitic interpretation. The present writer is of the opinion that such an interpretation does violence not only to the text but also to the central theme of the *BhP*. The *jiva-ātman* is definitely distinct from the *parama-atman*, as it exists by His grace²⁴. But as both are spiritual, there is also a certain non-difference between them²⁵. If they were absolutely the same, then there would be no scope for a real spiritual journey. If they were absolutely different then all spiritual life would be like the effort to make two parallel lines meet. To begin the spiritual life, it is enough if man realizes that the deepest in him is more akin to God than to the world, and that, consequently, only in Him can he find his true fulfilment.

Bhakti: the Bhagavata way to God

The *BhP* emphatically teaches that *bhakti* is the highest *dharma* of man²⁶, and only through *bhakti* can man attain his final destiny²⁷. All the other ways are not so effective as *bhakti*²⁸. Through *bhakti* man surrenders himself totally to the Lord, as Krishna himself teaches: "I shall once again show you how you can foster devotion to me. Have faith in my life-giving story and constantly proclaim it. Be steadfast in worshipping me. Sing about me with songs of praise. Serve me with respect and bow to me with all

22. *Amsa* 11.11.4; *kāla*, 1.3.27.

23. 6.4.24

24. 2.10.12.

This text has been taken as one of the primary *maha-vakyas* by Madhva, specially for his distinction between God and all else. The former is the only *sva-tantra* (self-dependent), while the latter is *para-tantra* (other-dependent, i.e., dependent on God). Since the Hindu tradition maintains that the *jiva* is eternal, commentators tone down this text, reading into it not absolute dependence of the *jiva* on God, but only its activity.

25. 11.22.10.

26. 1.2.6.

27. 1.15.15; 2.1.5. The second text contains the answer to 1.19.37, where a question is asked about the way to attain *samsiddhi*, i. e., perfection or final liberation.

28. 11.14.20-21.

your limbs. Be very eager to serve my devotees and see me in all creatures. Let all your limbs be engaged in doing my bidding, and let your speech spend itself in singing my goodness. Focus your mind totally on me, free yourself from all selfish desire. For my sake, put aside all sensual pleasures and (earthly) happiness. Let your offerings, alms-givings, sacrifices, prayers, vows, and penance be for my sake. Those men who having surrendered themselves (to me) follow this way of life, experience devotion to me, and there is nothing else they need to attain."²⁹ But *bhakti* is not just man's love for God. The *bhakta* is very dear to God³⁰.

Bhakti is not just a disposition of the spirit in man. But this inner disposition so transforms man that his whole being is affected. His total personality vibrated with the rhythm of love. Narada, who is proposed by the *BhP* as a model of devotion, describes his experience thus: "With a mind overcome by tender emotion, with eyes filled with tears of longing, I meditated upon the lotus-feet of the Lord. Slowly he appeared in my heart. Due to this vision I felt extremely happy; the love in my heart revealed itself in horripilation. I was so flooded with joy that I lost sight of Him and forgot myself."³¹ Krishna even seems to indicate that this emotional experience is an essential constituent of *bhakti*: "How can the mind be purified without devotion, accompanied by horripilation, by the melting of the heart, by tears of joy? He who has devotion to me speaks with a choked voice; his heart melts; sometimes he laughs and sometimes he cries; without any human respect he sings and dances with abandon. Such a devotee purifies the world."³²

In the *bhakti-marga* the presence of the Lord is concretely experienced in the temple, where His beautiful image is enshrined. The different temples, with their many images recalling the many saving deeds of Krishna, become for the devotee a sacramental experience. Service

29. 11.19.22-24. The quotations from the *BhP* are my own translation.

30. 11.14.15.

31. 1.6, 17-18.

32. 11.14.23-24.

of the temple becomes part of the devotee's spiritual life³³.

Spiritual life is a long and arduous journey. The *BhP* speaks of the different levels of *bhakti*, and of the different types of *bhaktas*. Man can love God for mean motives, e.g., he may want God to avenge him on his enemies — this is the *tamasika-bhakta*. The *rajasika-bhakta* expects worldly benefits from the Lord, while the *sattvika-bhakta* acts to free himself from his past sins, or out of a sense of obligation³⁴. In all these three types, the self is somehow present.

When *bhakti* reaches its maturity, then the devotee loves God for His sake. It is a disinterested love, with no personal gain in mind. In the *BhP* this perfect love of God is called *nirguna-bhakti*³⁵. The *bhakta* loves God because he is the most worthy of our love³⁶. The second characteristic of *nirguna-bhakti* is that it is firm and can face and overcome all opposition. It remains faithful even unto death³⁷. Of this we have a good example in the person of Prahlada, who in spite of all the persecution he had to suffer from his own father, remained faithful to the Lord³⁸. Lastly *nirguna-bhakti* is exclusive. The Lord is not just one of the many objects of love. He is the highest object, nay the only object of love. Consequently all other loves and attachments have to be subservient to this love³⁹. Hence when any other affection turns out to be an obstacle to the love of God, it must be abandoned⁴⁰.

Bhakti-marga: its universality and supremacy

We have noted early that the *BhP* proclaims *bhakti* as the highest *dharma* of man. Traditionally *dharma* is intimately linked with the two concepts of *varna* and

33. 9.4.17-20. 34. 3.29.8-10. 35. 3.29.11-12. 36. 3.9.42

37. The *BhP* uses different expressions to convey the idea of steadfast love: *apratihata* (1.2.6), *askhalita-mati* (1.5.27), *santata-anuvrtti* (1.3.38), *acala-bhava* (2.3.11), etc.

38. For details of the story, see 7:4-9.

39. For different expression to bring out this idea, see 1.1.4, 1.7.25, 1.8.13, 1.9.22, etc.

40. 3.25.22.

āśrama⁴¹. Within this frame-work, the Śūdra was the greatest loser. He was not allowed to study the Veda. The only *samskara* he could receive was *vivaha*. Hence the only *asrama* open to him was the life of the householder (*garhasthya*)⁴². *Mokṣa* — freedom from rebirth — could be acquired only by the proper observance of the fourth *asrama*, i. e., *sannyasa*⁴³.

In the *BhP* we do not find such discriminations. Birth in a high-caste family by itself is no guarantee for greatness⁴⁴. On the other hand men of all castes can attain perfection, because even the so-called dog-eaters can have devotion to the Lord⁴⁵. In the *BhP* we do come across some very saintly persons of low origins: Narada was the illegitimate son of a maid-servant⁴⁶; Vidura was a Śūdra⁴⁷; Śuka did not receive the initiation sacrament (*upanayana*)⁴⁸; Suta had not studied the Veda, nor could he⁴⁹. But the best example of perfect love for God is found in simple *gopis* of Vrindavan. That they attained the heights of love did evoke some surprise⁵⁰. The universalistic stand of the *BhP* finds its justification in the faith that God is the one Soul of all, and consequently He looks upon all without any partiality⁵¹.

As we have stated above, according to the Dharma-sastra writers, *mokṣa* could be attained only by the proper observance of the fourth *āśrama*, that is, *sannyasa*. Thus to attain *mokṣa*, man has to renounce everything, even his

41) See P. V. Kane: *History of Dharmasastra I* (Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968), p. 3

42) Kane: *op. cit.*, II, 154 64

43. *Ibid*, pp. 163, 422-24. 44. 7.7.51

45) The dog-eater (*svapaka*) is considered to be 'a man of a very low and degraded caste'. V. S. Apte: *The Students' Sanskrit English Dictionary* (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), p. 567

46, 1.5.23. 47. 3.5.20. 48. 1.2.2

49. When the sages justify themselves for choosing Suta to narrate to them the story of Krishna, they underline his wide learning. But the texts he has mastered are only *smṛiti*-texts. See 1.1.6,

0. 10.29.12. 51. 1.9.21

house, so that he is obliged to go from place to place. This would mean that a person involved in the secular sphere would have little chance of *moksa*. The *BhP* maintains that the highest love of God is possible even when one is involved in things mundane. Temporal commitment is not incompatible with holiness. We have the example of King Dhruve, who while he continues to rule his kingdom, has his senses fully under control⁵², his mind immovably fixed on the Lord⁵³. This is also true of King Prithu⁵⁴. Sudama is a simple householder, and yet the *BhP* presents him as a model of disinterested love for Krishna⁵⁵. That commitment to the world need not mean attachment to worldly things is best seen in the activity of God Himself. He is deeply involved in the process of creation, but in no way touched by it⁵⁶. This is true also of His *avatara*⁵⁷. The *bhakta* because he loves God, becomes like God.

Students of Indian Spirituality are familiar with the doctrine of the three *margas*: *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti*. There is also the discussion as to which of these three is the most effective. The *BhP* maintains that *karma*, at the most, serves a secondary purpose. Once man gets devotion to the Lord, he may abandon his *karma*⁵⁸. Even when one is engaged in *karma* it is *bhakti* that makes it fruitful⁵⁹. So too, *jñāna* is a pre-requisite for mature devotion⁶⁰. On the other hand, deep love leads to a fuller understanding of the beloved, but not without His grace⁶¹. Here again we need to keep in mind the *BhP* understanding of God: He is the great lover. Therefore only through love can we fully attain Him. But love is always a grace. We can love God because He has first loved us. Thus for the *BhP*, the way of love does not exclude the other two ways, but presupposes them and gives them their full possibility.

Obstacles to bhakti

The fact that the *BhP* gives so much importance to

52. 4.12.14. 53. 4.12.8. 54. 4.33.49.

55. For details of his visit to Krishna, see 10.80

56. 1.3.10. 57. 10.80.30. 58. 11.20.9 59. 8.23.15-16

60. 11.19.5. 61. 1.3.37-38, 2.9.30-31, 3.27.28

the way of love does not mean that it is easy. There are many obstacles that not only impede the progress of the pilgrim, but sometimes even drag him to the lower depths.

The *BhP* accepts the common Hindu idea that man is the victim of *avidyā*⁶², of a defective understanding of oneself, of the world, and of God. *Avidya* is of two types. There is first, what we may call, the fundamental ignorance, spoken of as the *anadi-avidya*⁶³. This is not merely an obstacle in man's spiritual journey, but the very condition of his existence in the world⁶⁴, an a priori condition of temporal existence. If man were to have full understanding of himself, he would no longer be a pilgrim, but would already be in full possession of his total destiny. Hence the opposite of *anadi-avidya* is not just some enlightenment but the total awareness of oneself, which is, therefore, at the same time, the total awareness of God in whom we have our being.

Besides this foundational ignorance, there is spiritual blindness due to which a man identifies himself with his body⁶⁵, which by its very nature is impermanent⁶⁶, and which one day will be devoured by dogs and jackals⁶⁷. Such a man does not make a distinction between matter and spirit, between soul and body⁶⁸. This blindness leads man to seek paltry pleasures⁶⁹. Making a god of himself, the spiritually blind man becomes very possessive⁷⁰, despising others⁷¹. This leads to sin: a conscious turning away of oneself from the Lord⁷². Without being purified from sin one cannot hope to receive the instruction needed for spiritual growth⁷³, much less to experience the Lord⁷⁴.

Spiritual blindness brings about a distortion of that legitimate love we have for our near ones, of the legitimate possession of things. All these are dear on account

62. For different expressions indicating ignorance, see 3.24.18, 3.27.9, 3.29.23, 3.31.34, 8.16.19, 11.19.42.

63. 11.22.10. 64. 8.24.46. 65. 11.19.42. 66. 3.30.3.

67. 2.7.42. 68. 8.16.19. 69. 3.9.7. 70. 7.5.11.

71. 3.29.23, 7.5.12. 72. 6.1.18. 73. 1.5.29-30.

74. 1.6.22, 3.25, 16-18.

of God⁷⁵, but now they become an impediment in our love for God. They become a knot that prevents the soul from flying upwards⁷⁶. This attachment can bring about a false sense of security⁷⁷. To procure more wealth one may even resort to questionable means⁷⁸, ignoring the demands of *dharma*⁷⁹. One of the sources of spiritual blindness is the pull of the senses. They should not be trusted even by the wise⁷⁹, for they can overcome even a person who is fully self-controlled⁸⁰.

While cautioning the spiritual pilgrim, the *BhP* singles out in a special way the sex-urge, at times, even sounding a bit unbalanced. Woman is said to be the door to hell⁸¹, like a grass-covered well leading a man to sure death⁸², the alluring call of a hunter out to trap its victim⁸³, the fire that sets ablaze a pot full of butter⁸⁴. It is easy to conquer the world than to conquer this urge⁸⁵. It is not that only man is tempted by sex⁸⁶. Perhaps nothing clouds man's understanding so much as the sex urge⁸⁷.

Lastly the *BhP* warns us against the adverse consequences of being in bad company. Particularly dangerous is the company of those who have abandoned themselves to their sex urges⁸⁸, because by their company "truthfulness, purity, compassion, control over the tongue, wisdom, prosperity, modesty, fair name, forbearance, control of mind and the senses, and good fortune are blotted out of existence"⁸⁹.

The role of grace in spiritual life

Unlike the other Puraṇas, the *BhP* claims to throw light on ten topics, of which *poṣaṇa*, which is explained as the grace (*anugraha*) of the Lord, is one. Thus the doctrine of divine grace is a major concern of the *BhP*⁹⁰. This is to be expected, for in the *BhP* God is above all the lover of men, eager to bestow His grace on His

75) 3.9.42. 76. 3.25.20, 77) 3.30.6. 78) 3.30.10-12.

79) 11.26.24. 80) 7.12.7. 81) 3.31.39. 82) 3.31.40 83) 3.31.42.

84. 7.12.9 85) 3.31.38. 86) 3.14.9 87) 3.31.35. 88) 5.5.2

89) 3.31.33. 90) 2.10.4'

devotees⁹¹. This is the expression of His parental affection⁹², of His love⁹³, of His compassion⁹⁴.

The grace of God should not be thought of as some passing reality. Man's very existence is grounded in the grace of God⁹⁵, and he experiences this grace every moment of his life⁹⁶. Man experiences grace as an inner illumination⁹⁷, an impulse towards God⁹⁸. This inward impulse is further strengthened through a change in the outer situation of man, making spiritual life possible and easy⁹⁹. God's grace to man is most powerfully revealed through the *avatara*¹⁰⁰, and through the company of holy people, who are in some way the presence of God Himself¹⁰¹. Strengthened by the grace of God, the spiritual pilgrim can face opposition¹⁰² and persevere in the service of the Lord¹⁰³, even when involved in secular activity¹⁰⁴. Gradually man becomes so transformed by grace that he becomes like God. Like Him, the grace-transformed man is graceful to all¹⁰⁵.

Spiritual discipleship

All the major spiritual traditions of India have insisted on the need of a *guru*, and the *BhP* is no exception. In fact it opens with request from some sages to Suta, whom they consider an apt guide in their journey through the ocean of life¹⁰⁶. There are many reasons why the *BhP* insists on the need of a spiritual guide. Man's life is short¹⁰⁷. An experienced guide can help us to focus our time and energy on those points that are really relevant. Further, man is lethargic, dull-witted, not favoured by fortune, and troubled by many things¹⁰⁸. Hence there must be someone

Though besides "*anugraha*", *prasada* (2.9.15, 3.1.42, etc.), *krpa* (2.7.16, 32, etc.), and *anukampa* (3.7.12, 5.8.23, etc.) are also used to indicate grace, our exposition is based exclusively on the use of "*anugraha*".

| | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| 91. 3.8.17 | 92. 1.11.10, 4.19.17 | 93. 8.24.15 |
| 94. 5.19.9 | 95. 2.10.12 See above, note 24 | |
| 96. 3.4.14 | 97. 3.31.15-16 | 98. 3.9.38 |
| 99. 1.6.10, 8.22.16, 10.88.8-9 | 100. 6.12.11 | 101. 4.22.16 |
| 102. 4.7.29 | 103. 1.6.25 | 104. 3.9.34-35 |
| 105. 6.5.39 | | |
| 106. 1.1.22 | 107. 1.1.10 | 108. Id. |

to encourage him. No doubt we have the scriptures, and the writings of the saints, but here too one cannot read, much less master, all this material. The guide knows what is the essential message of the scriptures¹⁰⁹. But the most important reason is that as *bhakti* is the highest *dharma* of man, it can best be communicated by one who is deeply in love with the Lord. The *BhP* also indicates what kind of person a guide should be.

Spiritual discipleship, to be effective, presupposes a certain disposition. Narada, who is portrayed as a model devotee, shares his experience with Vyasa, particularly how in his childhood he had been singularly favoured by some wandering ascetics: "To me, who was devoted to them, polite, free from sin, full of faith, imitating them, and, restrained though still a child, they who are full of kindness to the humble, while leaving, revealed the most secret knowledge, a knowledge given to them by the Lord Himself."¹¹⁰ We find such statements elsewhere in the *BhP*¹¹¹. The disciple should be earnest about his spiritual growth, not just listening to his teacher, but also acting upon his instruction¹¹². He always wants more¹¹³. This earnestness reveals itself in a seriousness of life that should characterize a mature person. Growth in the life of love means that the disciple is prepared to part with everything that may obstruct his love for the Lord¹¹⁴. In the episode of Krishna robbing the clothes of the young girls, it is this detachment that is emphasized: only when we are prepared to be stripped of every earthly are we fully prepared to meet the Lord. The guide helps the disciple by sharing with him his own spiritual experience, as Narada did with Vyasa. Hence faith is repeatedly stressed¹¹⁵.

Satsanga

The *BhP* places great importance on *satsanga* — the company of saints — as a means to God-realization¹¹⁶. If

109) 1.1.11

110) 1.5.29.30

111. 3.32.39-42, 11.29.30-31

112. 1.1.2

113. 1.1.19

114. For the various expressions the *BhP* uses to indicate the need of detachment, see 1.6.28, 1.13.25, 1.22.21, 3.25.24, 3.29.16, etc.

115. e.g., 1.1.11, 17, etc.

116. 4.24.57-58, 30.33-34, 10.13.6, 12.10.7

the most suitable means to realize God, the great Lover, is *bhakti*, then the best means to inculcate *bhakti* is the company of one who is deeply in love with God. In such a *sat-puruṣa* — holy person — we see in a concrete manner what the love of God can do to man. The principles of spiritual life are given a warm appeal by the life of a saint. Hence the company of saints is a school for holiness. But this *satsaṅga* is itself a grace of God.

The *sat-puruṣa* is characterized by universal charity¹¹⁷, because *satya* — the abstract noun derived from *satis* defined as "viewing all equally"¹¹⁸. Universal charity presupposes total death to oneself, a total renunciation of oneself. This is possible through the love of God, because love enables us to leave all else¹¹⁹. Further, a deep confidence in God's providence frees the *sat-puruṣa* from all possessiveness¹²⁰. The *sat-puruṣa* does not make a show of his piety; he is a deeply humble man¹²¹. Thus all this makes the *sat-puruṣa* a model to be imitated¹²².

The *bhakti-mārga* gives great importance to the *līlā* of the Lord. For it is this that moves man to love Him, for it reveals the love and goodness, the power and the glory of the Lord. In a real sense the saint is the *līlā* of the Lord, one transformed by the powerful love of God, and thus a revelation of His greatness¹²³. The *sat-puruṣa* is not merely a reflection of the holiness of God, but also a sacrament of His presence, for in him He is actively present¹²⁴. Hence through him God comes to his devotees¹²⁵.

Some other aids to bhakti

The Hindu spiritual tradition has given great importance to *tapas*. The *BhP* defines *tapas* as the abandonment of desire¹²⁶. Pleasure is not a value in itself, but is subservient to life¹²⁷. Thus *tapas* enables man to maintain the

117) For the different expressions used to bring out this idea, see 1.4.4, 1.5.24, 3.9.12, 3.14.48, 3.25.21, 4.22.18, 11.2.52, etc.

118) 11.19.37 119) 1.2.7 120) 2.2.4-5

121) 1.6.27, 3.32.6, 11.26.27 122) 3.14.15, 7.10.21

123) 1.16.13 124) 1.13.10, 9.9.6 125) 4.22.16

126) 11.19.37 127) 1.2.10

hierarchy of values. Without it he tends to dissipate himself, like a river that overflows its banks¹²⁸. *Tapas* is not the suppression of creative energy, but an effort to concentrate it towards the achievement of some definite goal¹²⁹. There are different forms of *tapas*. The *BhP* repeatedly insists on the need of sense-control¹³⁰.

Though the *EhP* nowhere speaks of the *aṣṭa-aṅga-yoga* of Patanjali, we find references to it scattered throughout the work. While Patanjali gives us only five *yamas* and *niyamas*¹³¹, the *BhP* gives us a more imposing list of twelve *yamas* and *niyamas*¹³². The *BhP* acknowledges the usefulness of a proper posture (*asana*) for prayer¹³³, and gives us some guidelines about it¹³⁴. This posture allows for the next step: *pranayama*, which is the source of great strength¹³⁵, leading to inner purity¹³⁶. We have mentioned earlier the need of controlling the senses (*indriya-pratyahara*) The practice of *pranayama* is also a help in controlling the senses¹³⁷.

The *BhP* does not make clear-cut distinctions between *dhāraṇa*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*, nor does it treat of their effects separately¹³⁸. It accepts the suggestion that the attention be fixed on some part of the body¹³⁹, and singles out in particular the tip of the nose¹⁴⁰. In the *bhakti-marga* it is but natural that the Lord becomes the object of the devotee's attention. This can be done in two ways. The devotee can focus his attention on the cosmic form of the Lord¹⁴¹, identifying the different parts of the universe with the limbs, organs, and senses of the cosmic

128) 10.20.10

129) 10.20.7. The meaning of *tapas* as the concentration of creative energy enables us to understand how even the Lord can say that *tapas* is his heart and that He is the soul of *tapas*. 2.9.22-23

130) 1.13.53, 1.10.23, 1.18.26, 2.9.8, 4.12.17

131) *Yoga-Sutra*, 2.30, 32. 132) 11.19.33-35

133) 1.13.53, 3.28.8, 4.8.43, etc.

134) The *asana* must be in a secluded place (2.1.16), clean and even (7.15.31); etc.

135) 11.19.39

136) 3.28.9

137) 4.23.8

138) e.g. 3.28.11-12

139) 2.1.18-19

140) 3.28.12, 7.15.32

141) 2.1.23

Purusa¹⁴². Or the devotee can meditate on the iconic form of the Lord, pictured as dwelling in the heart of the devotee¹⁴³. Through this meditation, the devotee gets lost in the Lord, and experience a loving union with Him¹⁴⁴.

The devotee learns from his *guru* the mystery of the Lord, but it is through his personal meditation that he experiences Him. This is the goal of the *rupa-dhyana* we have described in the previous paragraph. But there is one form of prayer to which the *BhP* attaches great stress: *nama-japa*¹⁴⁵. The *BhP* itself concludes with these words: "I bow to that supreme Lord, who is the remover of all sorrow, and the chanting of whose name destroys all sins."¹⁴⁶ *Nama-japa* is a universal prayer, for beginners as well as for those well-advanced on the way of perfection¹⁴⁷. This form of prayer can be continued even in the midst of work undertaken in obedience to the Lord¹⁵⁰.

Conclusion: Bhakti and Moksa

According to traditional Hinduism, human life has four goals, and *mokṣa* is the highest. For the *BhP* *bhakti* is higher than even the traditionally considered highest goal¹⁵¹. This can be understood if we accept *bhakti* not merely as a means, but the goal itself. *Bhakti* is thus the content of life eternal. Man must be free from all other attachments, all other bonds, so that he can love God totally. For this man needs to be freed even from the limits of time and space, from *samsara*¹⁵². If the *BhP* gives so much importance to *satsanga*, it is because man is called to an eternal *SAT-sanga*¹⁵³.

Subhash Anand

142) 2.1.26-37

144) 2.1.21, 11.14.27

147) 1.5.36, 1.18.19, etc

150) 1.5.36

153) For a more detailed discussion of this idea, see S. Anand: "Bhakti: a Meta-Purusartha", *Jeevadhara*, Jan-Feb, 1982, pp.52-68

143) 2.2.8, 3.28.12-33, etc.

145) 6.2.14, 12.3.36-46

148) 1.1.14, 1.18.19

152) 3.33.30, 4.12.35

146) 12.13.23

149) 2.1.11

151) 5.6.17

Spirituality of the Vishnu Purana

1. Introduction

Puranic Hinduism saw a departure from the cult of the personified natural powers like *Agni* (fire), *Mayu* (air), *Indra* (firmament), *Varuna* (water), *Aditya* (sun), *Ushas* (dawn), etc. The Puranas ushered in the worship of heroes like Rama, Krishna and others. While Vedic India had no temples and idols, Puranic Hinduism centred the cult in temples and idols. The ancient Greek and Roman gods were apotheosized heroes. Also there was no priest during the Rigvedic times. The husband and wife acted as priests in their home or in the open air, and the sacrifice was the simple fire-sacrifice.

It is not possible to conjecture when this simple religion and cult was succeeded by the worship of images and types, representing the new gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. Though the jurist Manu refers to image worship, yet he delegates the temple priests to a degraded position¹. In the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* we can trace the departure from the elemental Vedic cult and the origins and elaborations of myths and legends which form the great body of the Hindu mythological religion. Thus, the Epics are the real source of the Puranas.

Though the term 'Purana' designates that which is ancient, our present texts represent peculiarities which designate their origin at a later period when there was considerable theological development. Though the old cosmogonies are repeated in the Puranas, the myths get expanded

1) H.H. Wilson *The Metaphysics of Puranas*, (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1980), p.3

and get more definite shape. The idea of devotion especially to Siva and Vishnu, are new characteristics. The abstract metaphysical principle *Brahman* recedes to the background. Philosophical Monism had to give way to personal Theism. This could partly be explained by the emergence of heterodox religions like Buddhism and Jainism. In *Mahayana* Buddhism the Person of the Adorable One, *Bhagavan*, is the centre of worship. The effort of Brahmins to neutralise the rapid spread and popularity of Buddhism saw the emergence of *Personal* deities like Vishnu and Siva. This had the desired effect of check-mating the phenomenal advance of Buddhism in India.

Naturally, this had the side effect of producing in the tolerant Hindu psyche the unheard of spirit of religious intolerance. The heretics, though not persecuted, yet were despised and shunned. They were given the despicable epithets of the 'Naked' (*Nagnas*) and the 'Heretic' (*Pashanda*). During the Puranic period Siva and Vishnu are the almost exclusive deities.

Though phenomenologically the Puranic religion is a real departure from Vedism, yet metaphysically and theologically there is continuity. The Puranas are, on reflection, nothing but the popularised, materialised, and concretised forms of the Vedic teachings about God, the world and man. In fact, one Vedic text explicitly says: *Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti* (that which is One, the sages call by various names). The Advaitins consider the *Bhagavata Purana* as a popular text of Advaita Vedanta.

H.H. Wilson is bewildered by the incongruities and absurdities found in the Puranas and he explains them by the author's attempt, "to assign reality and significancy" to what was merely metaphor or mysticism. Yes, there is a deep and genuine undercurrent of true mysticism behind the apparently grotesque facade of the Puranic myths.

2. Value of myth

Myth is not fiction. According to Aristotle, myth is also wisdom. The Pauline contrast between myth and truth has been the consistent Christian paradigm in any contro-

versy with non-Christian religions. Till recently myth was considered to be a primitive mode of thought¹, especially in the 'mythical school' of Bauer and Gunkel which identified myth with polytheism. But thanks to the studies of Mircea Eliade, Cassirer and others, today myth has been respectably rehabilitated. It is surprising that even the Oxford dictionary has retained the old pejorative meaning of myth. Even such a great Scripture scholar like Fr. Benoit, O.P., believes that "myth introduces error and fiction into the very essence of religious speculations about the divinity"². But then a part of the Bible is not history in the modern sense but saga and poetic and divinatory elaboration of history. The Biblical creation story contains some elements from Babylonian myths and the Judaeo-Christian eschatology contains Iranian apocalyptic elements and apocalyptic is not history. In this context, C.H. Dodd has a pertinent remark: "These first and last things can be spoken only in symbols. They lie, obviously, outside the realm of time and space to which all factual statements, refer. They are not events as the historian knows events but realities of a supra-historical order; in referring to them the Biblical writers make free use of mythology"³. Conceptual theology cannot claim any superiority over mythical theology, for in the final analysis, theological statements as well as theological myths are mere mental tools with the potentiality of degenerating into idols. Christian speculative theology, making use of the Greek conceptual paradigm, and the excessively rationalistic Scholastic methodology, have almost succeeded in converting Christianity into a philosophy, the very thing the early Church condemned in Gnosticism.

But in one sense, mythic theology is superior to conceptualistic theology, because, according to Van der Leeuw, "doctrine can never completely discard the mythical if it wishes to avoid falling to the level of a mere philo-

2) O.P. Benoit, *La Prophetie*, 1974

3) C.H. Dodd, *The Bible Today*, p.112

sophical thesis"⁴. Millar Burow has summarised the new view of myth: "it implies not falsehood but truth; not primitive naive misunderstanding, but an insight more profound than what scientific description and logical analysis can ever achieve. The language of the myth, in this sense, is consciously inadequate, being simply the nearest we can come to a formulation of what we can see very darkly"⁵.

Though Monotheistic religions like Judaeism, Christianity and Islam glory in the idea of One God, we must not forget that God transcends the antinomy of One-many. For Plotinus and St. Augustine, the highest category is One. But for Sankara and Pseudo-Dionysius, God transcends One⁶. An ancient Hindu mystic has expressed this thought thus: *Yato vaco nivartante aprapya manasa saha* (God is that wherefrom words turn back, together with the mind, not having attained)⁷. The ancient Hindus developed a 'jungle concept' of the deity. Ancient India's impenetrable Indo-Gangetic jungles formed a thick under-growth of intertwined plant system in chiaroscuro, unexplorable in their many by-paths which in an inextricable maze meet and cut each other. This conceals an unknown life force (*elan vital*) which never reveals itself in a distinguishable single light⁸. This jungle-notion of the Absolute finds expression in the Puranas. This is seen in the wild tumult of rhythmic movements in sculpture and in the piling up of similes and metaphors in Sanskrit poetry. The S. Indian temples *gopura*, the temple drama, sacred dance, Puranic recitation, etc. are the means used to proclaim and celebrate the Hindu religious myth. The Myth is the Hindu catechetics per excellence. *Logos* is a category that is assimilated to *mythos* and their combination gives us mythology. The

4. Van der Leeuw, *Religion: its essence and manifestation*, (London), p.444

5. Millar Burrow, *An Outline of Biblical Theology*, (Philadelphia; 1946) pp. 115-16

6. Pseudo-Dionysius, *P.G.* III, 1048 A

7. *Taittiriya Upanishad*; II, 4

8. Betty Heimann, *Facets of Indian Thought*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), p.89

hermeneutic or interpretation of myth is *logos*. *Mythologumenon*, another cognate term, is the mythical story or narration. It is the form or garment in which the myth happens to be expressed. Raimundo Panikkar says that myth is that on which we cannot lay our finger without dispelling it. It is something that we cannot *manipulate*. In other words, myth transcends the realm of reason. Myth is to be celebrated, lived, experienced. Then only we become contemporaries of the events we celebrate. Myth, God, person, etc, cannot be *objects* of thought. If we think out God, He vanishes; if we think out a person, he escapes; if we think out religions, they are destroyed. It is with these hermeneutical tools that we have to approach Puranic theology with a view to fruitful inter-religious dialogue⁹.

3. Vishnu Purana: analysis

Of all the eighteen Puranas, the Vishnu Purana conforms most closely to Amara Sinha's definition: that which has the 'Pancha Lakshana'. The text is divided into six books. The first book deals with creation, both primary (*sarga*) and secondary (*pratisarga*). The first explains how the universe proceeds from *Prakriti* or eternal Prime Matter. The second creation explains in what manner the objects of the world evolve.

The cosmology of the Vishnu Purana is taken from the very ancient *Samkhya* System. But the grafting of the partial Vedantic system makes the theology of the Vishnu Purana rather confusing. Thus, it is repeatedly declared in our text that Vishnu is one with the Supreme *Brahman* and that He is not only *Purusha* (Spirit) but also *Prakriti* or the primordial creative matrix. In addition, he is also *Vyakta* (phenomenal world) and *Kala* (cosmic Time). This is a clear departure from the exaggerated transcendentalism of the Upanishadic spirituality. Speaking about Puranic theology, H.H. Wilson says that Hinduism is "constructive conservatism"¹⁰.

The Puranans, and the Vishnu Purana in particular, have rejected the rigorous caste mentality and anti-feminine

9. Cf. R. Panikkar, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), *passim*.

10. H.H. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p. 67

outlook of the *Sutras* and the *Dharmasastras*. They are more sympathetic to the *Sudras* and to women. Our *Puranakara* says in one place that the *Sudras* and women are fortunate in the *Kali Yuga*. A contemporary text says: "Women, *Sudras* and the mean twice-born, are not entitled to the *Vedas*; it is only for their good that the *Puranas* have been written"¹¹.

4. The social theology of the Vishnu Purana

The Brahminic social fabric was torn asunder by the heterodox doctrines of Buddhism, Jainism, the Charvakas, the Ajivikas etc. Therefore, with a view to safeguard their socio-economic interests, the Brahmins began to buttress the crumbling *Varnasrama dharma* with new ideas and strategies. Therefore, our *Purana* gives the pride of place to the *Grihasthasrama* or the householder's stage of life. Our *Puranakara* is a Brahmin and naturally he gives his caste the highest rung in the social ladder. To prove his claim, he makes the fantastic statement that even the gods observe the caste system! Vedic study was the main duty of the Brahmins. They had also the obligation to impart this knowledge to others. Imparting the sacred knowledge was considered a free service and those who taught for livelihood were severely condemned. They were ostracised from the *Sraddha* ceremony. Kalidasa too condemned such teachers. But they were given the voluntary gift called '*Gurudakshina*'.

To prop up the practice of *dakshina*, the priests told the people that those who did not give alms to the Brahmins were not true devotees of Lord Vishnu¹², and that ultimately, the alms were of spiritual advantage to one's own ancestors.

A new social theology emerged during the Puranic period: the rigid occupational doctrine of the *Brahmanas* had to make adjustments under severe socio-economic pressure from the *Pashandas* (heretics) and the upgraded *Sudras* (some *Sudras* had become kings) and

11. *Devibhagavata* 1.3.21

12. *Vishnu Purana*, III.7.29

our Puranakara says that Brahmins could follow the professions of the Kshatriyas and the Vaisyas in times of distress¹³. This is known as *Apat dharma*. Some Brahmins took to politics and administration while others fought battles!

The Kshatriyas come next in the caste hierarchy. Their main duty was to give alms to the Brahmins, protect society from external aggression, study the Vedas and offer sacrifices. Several of them took to Yoga and the practice of aceticism. The *Vaisyas* or the farmer and trader, were the real backbone of Hindu economy and they were much esteemed and well cared for. The Puranakara prescribed the terrible punishment of Hell for the murderer of the farmer¹⁴. The *Sudra* was the lowest rung in Hindu, caste hierarchy. For the Vishnu Purana, the heretics were also considered as Sudras. Between the first century B.C. and the fourth century A.D., many of the Sudras had embraced Buddhism and with a view to prevent further landslide conversions to Buddhism, the Puranakara promised Heaven to the Sudras for faithful performance of service to the high caste people¹⁵. They were told that menial work would raise them to the status of the heavenly *Gandharvas*. Our Purana appreciates their work in the *Kali Yuga*. The Puranas did not consider manual work mean. In order to prevent the Sudras from joining the *Pashandas*, our Purana and Manu allowed the Sudras to offer certain sacrifices, but without uttering the *mantras*.

5. The Asrama theory of the Vishnu Purana

Our Purana continued the practice of the ancient *Asrama* spirituality. The *Brahmachari* was expected to be a very disciplined man, showing great respect to his *Guru*. He had to render him domestic service called *susrushanam*. They were expected to beg their food from house to house. According to the *Satapatha Brahmana*, this practice would inculcate in the students the virtues of humility and renunciation. The status of the householder was the highest because it supported all the rest. Since Buddhism and

13. *Vishnu Purana*, III.8.39

14. *Ibid.*, II.6.10

15. *Ibid*, VI 2,23

Jainism had given great importance to celibate asceticism, the Puranas wanted to protect the Hindu householder from these heretics and for this purpose they gave the most important place to the householder.

The householder had to perform the famous *Pancha-maha yajnas* or the five great sacrifices, viz., offering of *pinda* to the manes; vedic *yajna* to the gods; study of the Vedas to honour the sages; hospitality to the stranger; food to animals. From Vedic times, hospitality was considered a great Indian virtue. It was given the cultic status of a sacrifice and it was called *Nriyajna*, literally, sacrifice to man. The *Grihya Sutra* has laid down detailed rules for *Nriyajna*. Our Purana defines a guest as, "he who is not an inhabitant of the same village, but who comes from another place and whose name and lineage are unknown"¹⁶. This definition of the 'guest' may sound strange to our modern urban mentality, since it excludes our relatives and friends. The ancient traveller had no hotels to go to, and the householder was his only hope. To help the strangers, the Hindu lawgivers told the householder to restrict hospitality to utter strangers as a sign of true humanity. The ancient Hindus considered the guest as a god. Our Purana says that he who feeds himself and neglects the guest goes to Hell. Hospitality was considered efficacious to remove one's sins¹⁷. The jurist Apastamba lays down that the host should accompany the guest till the boundary of his property.

The *Vanaprasthasrama* was the third stage of life. Our Puranakara says that one should take to this way of life only after having discharged all the obligations to his family and to society. Eremitism and Cenobitism practised by the Buddhists and the Jains had been attracting many people to the mendicant life and the forest life. Our Purana wanted to oppose this exodus from Hindu society. *Sannyasa* was the last stage. Total renunciation was expected of him, including freedom from fear. He should be indifferent to friends and yet he must be friend of all living beings. He

¹⁶. *Vishnu Purana*, II.59

¹⁷. *Ibid.*, III.11.65

cannot demand food, but must beg it only when the fire in the hearths had been put out, and all had eaten their meals. He was asked to overcome craving, greed, anger and pride¹⁸. The sphere of Brahma was promised to the faithful *sannyasi*.

6. Sacramental theology

The ancient Hindus were mystified by the strange phenomena in the physical life of man, especially those connected with birth and death. The pre-scientific primitive man associated evil and benevolent spirits with these mysterious events. A good amount of magic is mixed up with religion in the Sacramental systems of the world religions. The ancient Hindus used nature's powerful elements like fire, water and sound to develop an elaborate sacramental theory. The Hindu *Samskaras* or Sacraments gave protection and comfort to the recipients. The Vishnu Purana gives the details of the first Samskara, though without naming it. From conception (*Garbhadhana*) till child-birth, the Hindu mother was surrounded by all the comforts of religion. The idea of original sin is totally absent from this system, though birth defiles mother and she had to be ritually purified. Sex was one of the four *Purusharthas* or goals of man. There was nobody-soul dichotomy as we find in Neoplatonism or Stoicism and in some of the Church Fathers and theologians. But intercourse was forbidden during certain feast days and its violation was thought to entail the punishment of Hell! R.B. Pandey gives an astronomical reason for this rule.

Adultery was considered a heinous crime. Celibacy was a disvalue. Marriage was obligatory. In all kinds of marriages, girl's consent was not a deciding factor. She was given as a gift by her father, and it was called *kanyadan* or virgin gift. While the physical and moral defects of the bridegroom were overlooked, the bride should be a paragon of physical and moral perfection.

7. The sacrificial spirituality

There is ample evidence in the Vishnu Purana that

18. *Ibid.*, III.9.30

a number of ancient Vedic sacrifices were in vogue during the period of the Vishnu Purana, and our Purana refers to Vedic sacrifices like *Rajasuya*, *Asvamedha*, *Agnishtoma*, *Vajapeya* etc. He also refers to sacrifices lasting five hundred or even a thousand years! It is no doubt, an exaggeration to stress the importance of Vedic sacrifices at a time when it was ridiculed by the "Pashandas" and "Nagnas".

The aim of the sacrifice was mainly to obtain this-worldly benefits and material blessings. Thus, we read of the sage Parasara performing sacrifices for the destruction of the Rakshasas. Also, sacrifices were considered essential for the preservation of the kingdom, the king's life and for the benefit of his subjects. The Vishnu Purana also says that sacrifices would obtain Heaven. The offering of the sacrificial fee was an important item of religious life in the Puranic period. This custom goes back to Vedic times. The *Satapatha Brahmana* says that no priest should officiate at a *Soma* sacrifice for a fee less than one hundred cows¹⁹! The Vishnu Purana insists that a fee should be given to the Brahmins after the *Srāddha* meal for the departed ancestors. Strangely, there was meat at the *Sraddha* meal for the dead. They ate the meat of hare, mongoose, wild boar, goat, deer, sheep and fish.

The Puranic spirituality was also Scriptural. The three Vedas (*Rig*, *Yajur*, and *Sama*) were the 'clothes' of the believers and those who discarded them were called *Nagnas* (naked), a term designating the *Nastikas* or heretics. The term *Nagna* was also extended to those who were unfaithful to their proper duties and pious works. The non-believers of the Vedas did not consider that the Vedic authority fell from Heaven. They believed texts that were based on reason alone.

The Puranakara is very severe in his condemnation of those who rejected Vedic authority. He forbade even conversation with the *Pashandas*. To press the point further, he fabricated the story of king Satadhanu who in

19. *Saapatha Brahmana*, IV.3.4

his rebirth took the form of an animal for the great 'crime' of talking to a *Pashanda*²⁰.

8. Spirituality of social life

By and large, the relation between the different religions and religious sects were cordial. The ancient Hindu tolerance was visible in their mutual relations. Thus we see the Buddhist king Damodara Varman putting faith in the Hindu rite of *Hiranyagarbha*. A pious Hindu called Nathasarma issued land grant for the worship of Jain *Arhats*²¹. Though king Saniamula of the Ikshvaku dynasty was an enthusiastic follower of the Vedic religion, several members of his family were Buddhists²². The Kadamba kings Krishna Varman and Mrigesa Varman were Hindus; yet, they made grants to a Jain establishment out of their reverence for Mahavira. The Vishnu Purana notes that several sects of Hinduism lived side by side in perfect harmony. Though our text notes a rivalry between the Vedic god Indra and the new Supreme god Vasudeva Krishna, their relation was cordial. This spirit of accommodation and compromise is one of the main characteristics of Puranic spirituality. This is expressed in the myth of Indra taking part at the coronation of Sri Krishna after he had made unsuccessful attempts to destroy Gokula, the capital of Sri Krishna's empire.

Similarly, though Siva had been defeated by Krishna, they do not appear as rivals. The Puranic spirit of syncretism is clearly seen in Sri Krishna's words to Siva: "You are fit to comprehend the doctrine that you are not distinct from Me. That which I am, thou art... men contemplate distinctions because they are stupified by ignorance"²³.

Against the socio-religious background of present day India, this Puranic spirit of tolerance and mutual enrichment, is a crying need. Today Indians harbour terrible hatred and fear against one another mainly based on man-made distinctions of caste, creed, and sect. Many innocent

20. *Ibid.*, III.18.52. ff

21. *Epigraphia Indica*, XX.62

22. *Ibid.*, XX.p.16

23. *Ibid.*, V.33, 46-49

lives are mercilessly destroyed because of their membership to a particular caste or religion. This fear psychosis has made this land of tolerance most unfit for living in peace and harmony. The rulers who preach violence and hatred for one another, should think of the noble examples of Ashoka Maurya, Akbar the Great, and other men of universal vision and tolerance. Neither Krishna nor Buddha would approve of the terrible slaughter of innocent people in today's conflict-ridden India. It is high time that we resume the inter-religious dialogue initiated by Akbar in his life time. Those who do not want to tolerate others' views, should recall the beautiful words of the *Rig Veda*: "Let noble thoughts come to us from all sides."

Sacred Heart Seminary
Poonamallee
Madras - 600 056

Swami Vikrant

DISCUSSION FORUM

The Curran Case: Some Theological Considerations

The final declaration of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) that Fr. Charles E. Curran (professor of moral theology in the Catholic University of America) is "not suitable nor eligible to exercise the function of a professor of Catholic theology" has been widely reported in the Catholic press also in this country. It makes one sad to see that no Indian theologian has spoken up in response to a situation deeply affecting his own profession and the life of the church. One abhors to suspect that Indian theologians have condemned themselves to some sort of terrorised silence. However that be, I wish to make some reflections on what I see as a very grave crisis obtaining in the Church and I hope others will join in the discussion.

Fr. Curran has been declared "not suitable nor eligible" to be a professor of Catholic theology because of his dissenting views. These views, definitely rejected by the CDF include "a right to public dissent from the Ordinary Magisterium, the indissolubility of marriage, abortion, euthanasia, masturbation, artificial contraception, premarital intercourse and homosexual acts" (Letter of the CDF to Fr. Curran, dated 25 July 1986).

This is obviously not the place for a discussion of the individual points. My reflection will confine itself to the first and basic point, namely, the "right to public

dissent from the Ordinary Magisterium", that is to say, on points of doctrine not solemnly defined as dogmas and manifestly demonstrable as such.

Beforehand, however, we must briefly advert to a fact, with two aspects. One is that the dissenting views of Fr. Curran are well known to be shared by the great majority of Catholic theologians — at least, if the articles in theological journals are any criteria. The second aspect is that, by and large, such views are not only readily accommodated but hardly even contested in other Christian churches, especially of the Reformed or Evangelical tradition. This fact, its latter aspect in particular, is, I believe, pregnant with meaning in today's situation. The question cannot be sidetracked: how long can the Catholic Magisterium (if we choose to restrict its scope to the Vatican) continue to maintain a holier-than-all-others or we-alone-are-in-the-right attitude (an attitude which exactly defines pharisaism as separatism) and still be seriously and honestly committed to ecumenism?

A point repeatedly emphasized by Curran is that his dissent concerns points of *non-infallible* doctrine. The CDF rejects the distinction between infallible and non-infallible doctrines in regard to the contested points. It cites in support the statement of Vatican II that, while the bishops cannot teach infallibly in their individual capacity, "when, however, they, even though spread throughout the world, but still maintaining the bond of communion between themselves and with the successor of Peter, and authentically teaching on matters of faith and morals, are in agreement that a particular position ought to be held as definitive then they are teaching the doctrine of Christ in an infallible manner" (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 25).

I leave out of consideration the theological and practical problems arising out of the very concept of infallibility as applied to the Magisterium in the face of such instances as Pope Boniface VII's bizarre-sounding proclamation, "we declare, state, define, and proclaim" that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature should

be subject to the Roman Pontiff" (*The Christian Faith*, ed. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, TPI, 1981, No. 804) — a doctrine that has been clearly disowned by Vatican II by declaring that salvation is attainable by not only non-Catholics and non-Christian believers but also by "those who, without blame on their part have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strives to live a good life, thanks to his grace" (*The Church*, n. 16).

Coming to the main point, namely, the 'right to public dissent from the Ordinary Magisterium', I think the CDF's stance has very grave consequences. The gravity of the matter becomes clear when one considers that the action against Curran has more than disciplinary implications. It most intimately touches the moral conscience, in regard to which no human being has any sort of alibis when called to account before God.

The distinction between public and private dissent (the latter apparently still allowed) itself seems to be wholly unwarranted and dangerous. It is *not* funny that the CDF does not seem to mind individuals holding and acting on convictions which are according to it morally wrong, but would not tolerate responsible expression of such convictions, which may be the only means for those concerned to correct themselves. By forbidding public dissent and discussion, the CDF would seem to foreclose the very possibility of correction of privately held wrong moral views.

Another anomaly of the CDF's ban on public dissent is that it will not and cannot put an end even to public dissent. For one thing, it is not clear that it either wants to or can silence all dissenting theologians. But even if that were achieved, there would still remain ample room for public dissent by *non-theologians*. The only difference would be that, while professional theologians writing in scholarly journals would have carried on a professional discussion, in their absence theologically amateurish and sensationalistic journalism would take over. And whatever the CDF feels about such a situation, nothing could be done

with it, having fully eliminated the only sobering and mediating professional elements.

Secondly, the CDF's refusal of the distinction between infallible and non-infallible doctrines must necessarily reopen the door to theological and ecclesio-political totalitarianism, inquisition and witch hunting, all of which, one should have thought, Vatican II had definitely consigned to the farthest corners of painful memory. Nor does the CDF seem to be warranted to invoke the Council's authority in its support. The operative clause in the conciliar text, cited by the CDF is "when...they (the Bishops) ... are in agreement that a particular position ought to be held as definitive". The least that must be said about this interpretation is that it must be demonstrated that on the contested points the world Catholic episcopate indeed "are in agreement that a particular position ought to be held as definitive", so that any reconsideration or reform is a priori ruled out and dissent would automatically place the dissenter outside the Catholic communion, as would happen in the case of dissent from a truly infallible doctrine. As a matter of fact, as Curran has also not failed to point out, even according to Canon 749, 3. "No doctrine is understood to be infallibly defined unless this is manifestly demonstrated."

And there would seem to be very good reason for this clear and prudent statement of the Canon. For, consider the following consequence of the CDF's claim of infallibility to the doctrine, for example, on artificial contraception. According to the available sociological data, even in a country like India, hardly characterised by popular theological enlightenment or avant-guardism, Catholics resort to artificial contraception *at least* as much as others without any qualm of conscience. (Was it not amusing to read some time ago in the *Indian Express* a presumably loyal Catholic's challenging indignantly a non-Catholic author for asserting that the papal doctrine banned all artificial contraception as immoral!) This situation in the world Church is not unknown in Vatican circles. As a matter of

fact, Archbishop John R. Quinn of San Francisco described precisely this situation in the Synod on Family in 1984 and pleaded for a change in the doctrine so that there wouldn't persist such a gulf between magisterial doctrine and actual popular practice. That plea of course went unheeded. What the present situation comes to, therefore, is that the Magisterium has acquiesced and inevitably so in a state of widespread "heresy" in the Church - for what else is heresy if not the cool, deliberate and persistent dissent from "infallible" doctrine? Another question which inevitably occurs in this connection is, if the CDF is so certain about its own position, what prevents the exercise of the Extraordinary Magisterium on the contested points in order to put an end to all further dissent?

A third consideration is on the function of the theologian in the Church. It has been pointed out by an author (an academic teacher "thankfully not in any pontifical university") in *The Tablet* that the theologian's function is "not to teach the doctrine (a gramophone could do that), but to examine, explore, explain, if possible establish the grounds for its being taught, and to correlate these grounds with those for other related doctrines..." (20 September 1986, p. 974).

The theologically crucial point, however, is that, however much the Magisterium is normative for theology, it is *not* the ultimate and absolute norm. The Magisterium is *norma normata* (the relative and subordinate norm), alongside Scripture, Tradition and the 'signs of the times'. The *Norma normans*, the absolute and ultimate Norm, ultimately alone normative and normative of all other norms, is the Living God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, guiding and leading the Church by his Holy Spirit. The absolute and, ultimately speaking, *only* commitment of the theologian, as of every Christian, is to this God, who will not tolerate other gods beside Himself. The theologian is *Theo*-logian, not magisteriologist or ecclesiologist; and being *theo*-logian, he needs must publicly articulate his faith-exploring

and faith-interpreting word (*logos*) fearlessly, even when that word happens to be in dissent from that of the Magisterium.

The theologian must, therefore, sometimes act *vis-à-vis* the Magisterium as did the prophets *vis-a-vis* all human authorities. The prophet does not teach and dissent from the official line, by the leave and permission of those in power. His vocation as prophet rather makes his work in a certain manner essentially independent and critical of all human authority. Neither is such prophecy unique to the Old Testament. There is Paul in the New Testament jealously guarding and relentlessly exercising his apostolic rights and duties independently of those who were apostles before him, whom he also gladly recognised as "leaders" and "pillars" (Gal 1 & 2) of the ecclesial communion which he cherished as the apple of his eye. Paul meant no disrespect to these "men of repute" (Gal 2:2-6) when he so emphatically asserted that he was "an apostle — not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead" (Gal 1:1) and so exercised his fully legitimate, indeed, non-negotiable independence-in-communion from them and what they represented.

Paul has thus set a pattern for every true theologian and Christian. If the post-Constantinian popes have claimed for themselves the combined authority of Peter and Paul, that deviation cannot continue to be any justification for such totalitarian claims in the light of today's biblical reawakening and renewal. If it be true, as the bishops do not cease to repeat, that "the Church is not a democracy", it is also true that the Church of God is even less a hierocracy in God's name, but essentially a fraternal communion of the People of God, for whose day-to-day management in this time and age, an administration responsible and accountable before the People, that is to say, democracy, would seem to be much more suitable than an absolute monarchy bearing the marks of its birth in

the dark ages. And this is not because the people are the source of authority, but because divine authority, meant to serve and build up the people cannot be exercised irresponsibly and 'independently' of the people by those who call themselves their servants, because expressions like "servants of the servants of God" must some day cease to be the mockery of truth.

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J. Kottukapally

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